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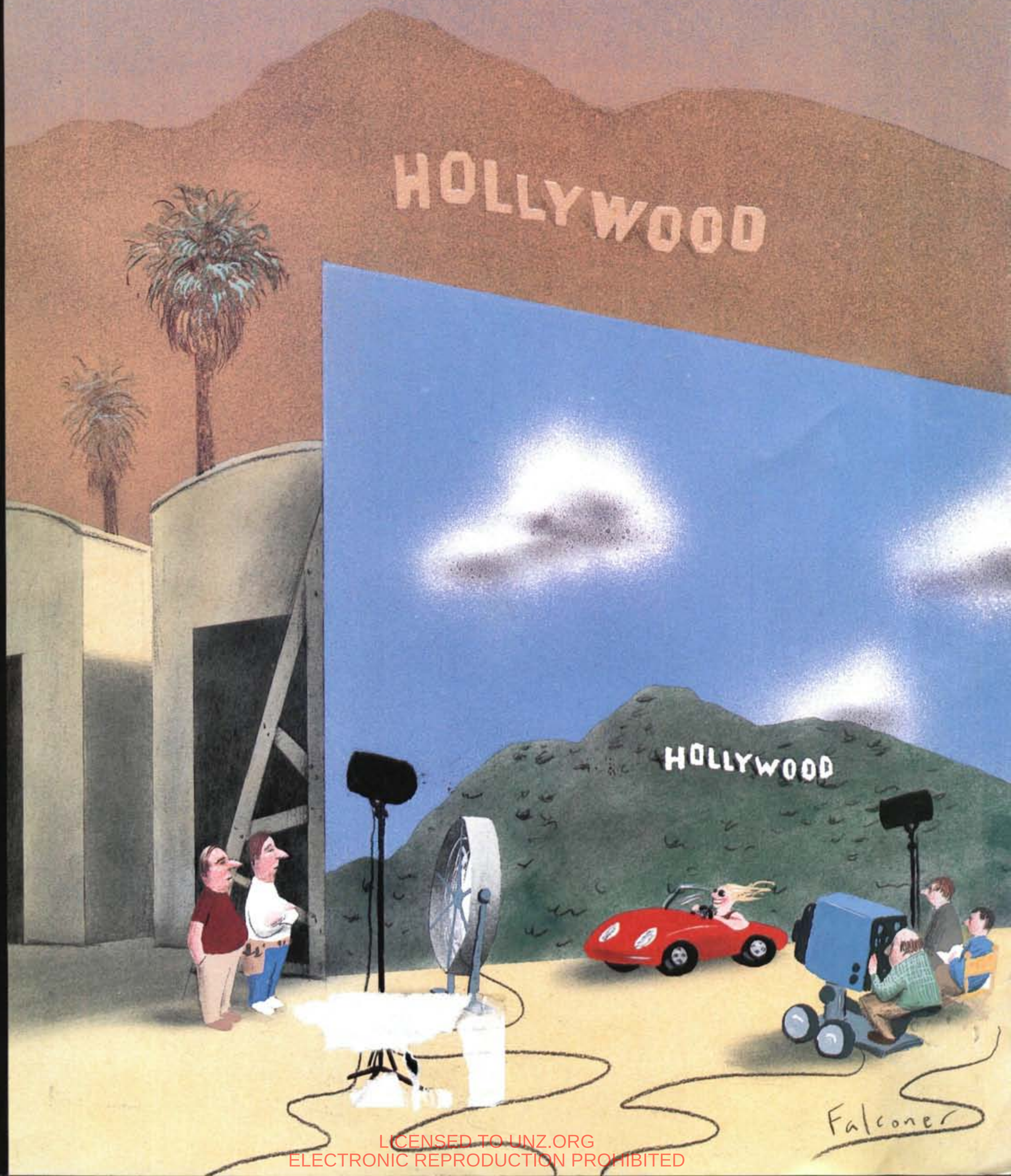
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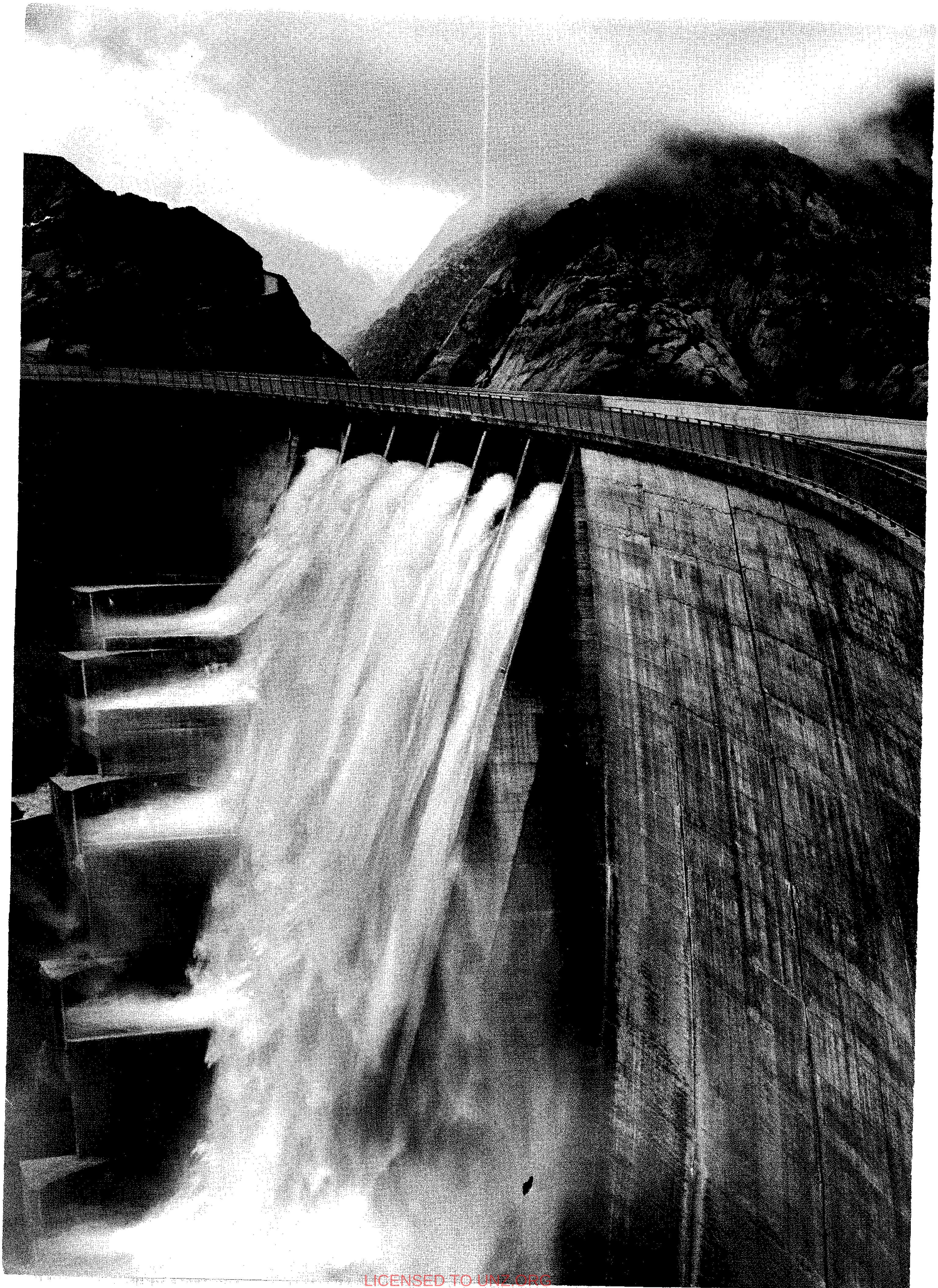

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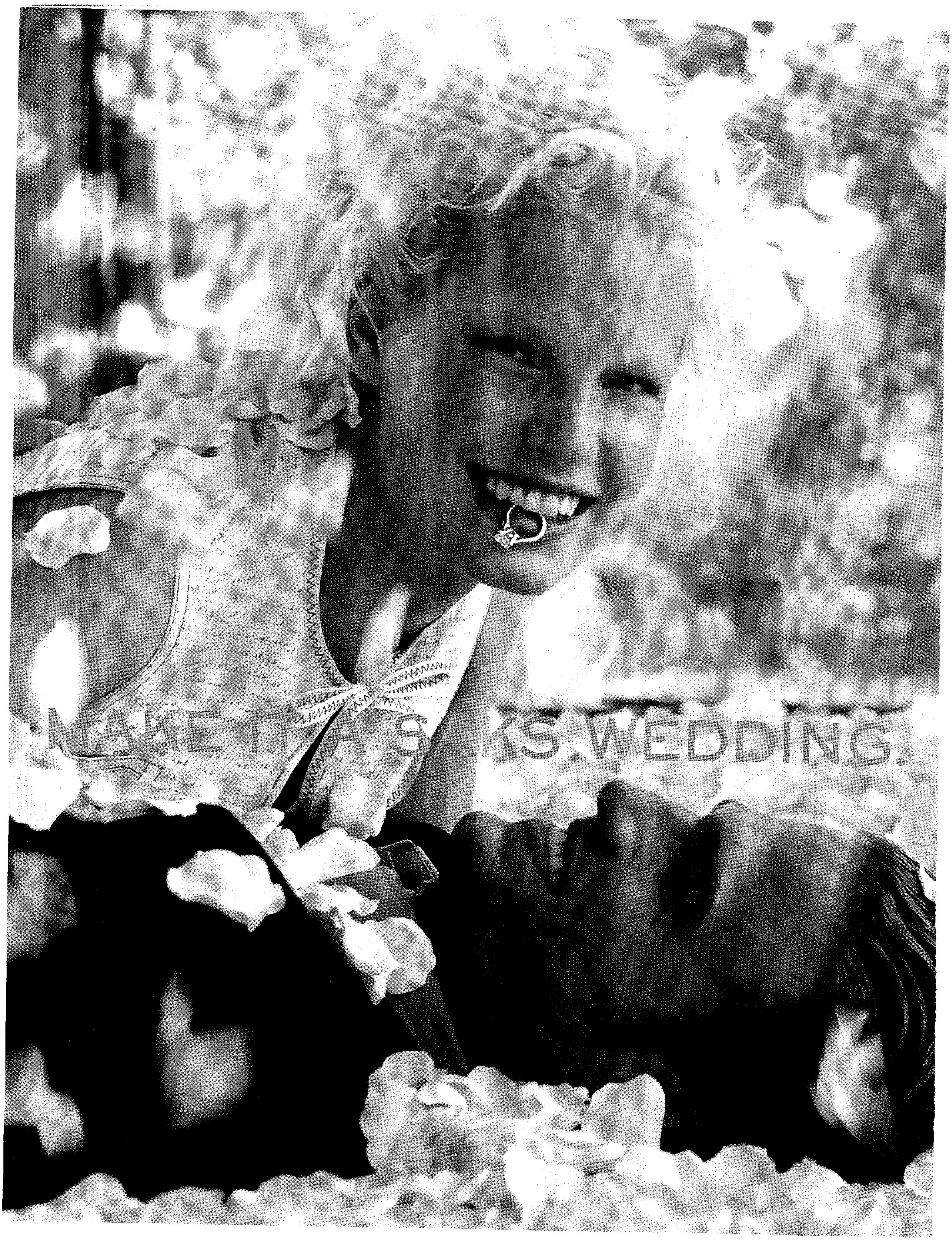
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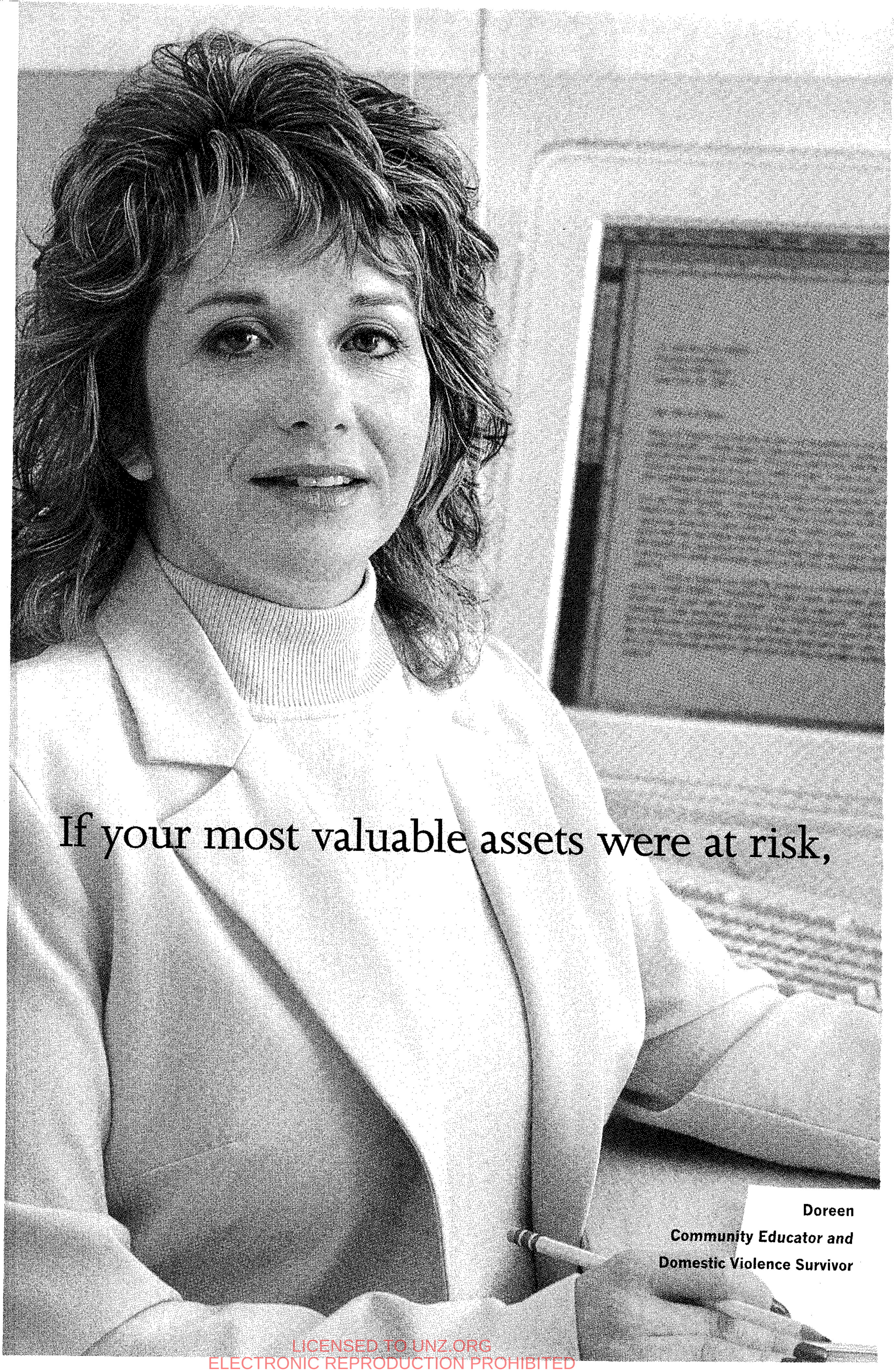
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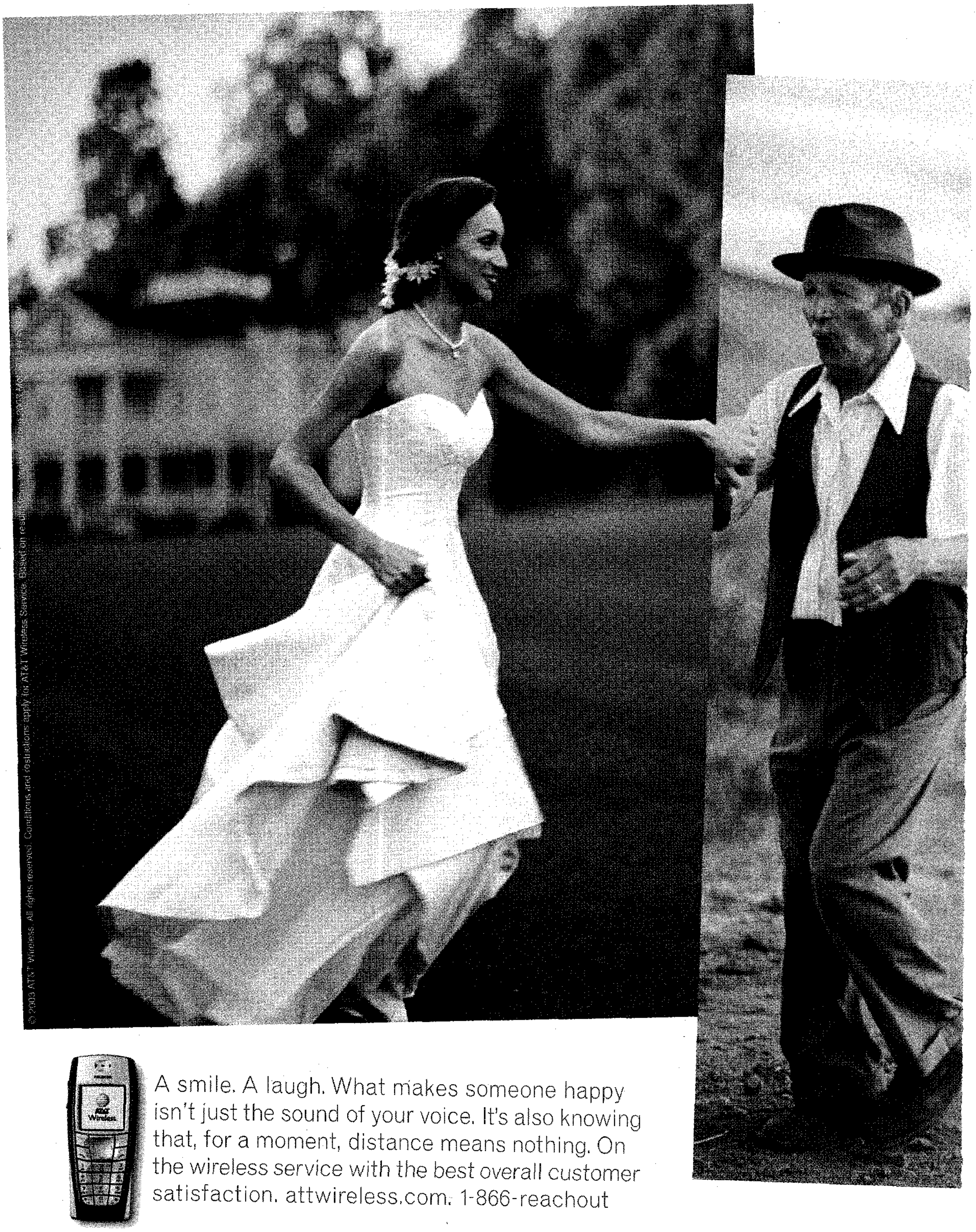

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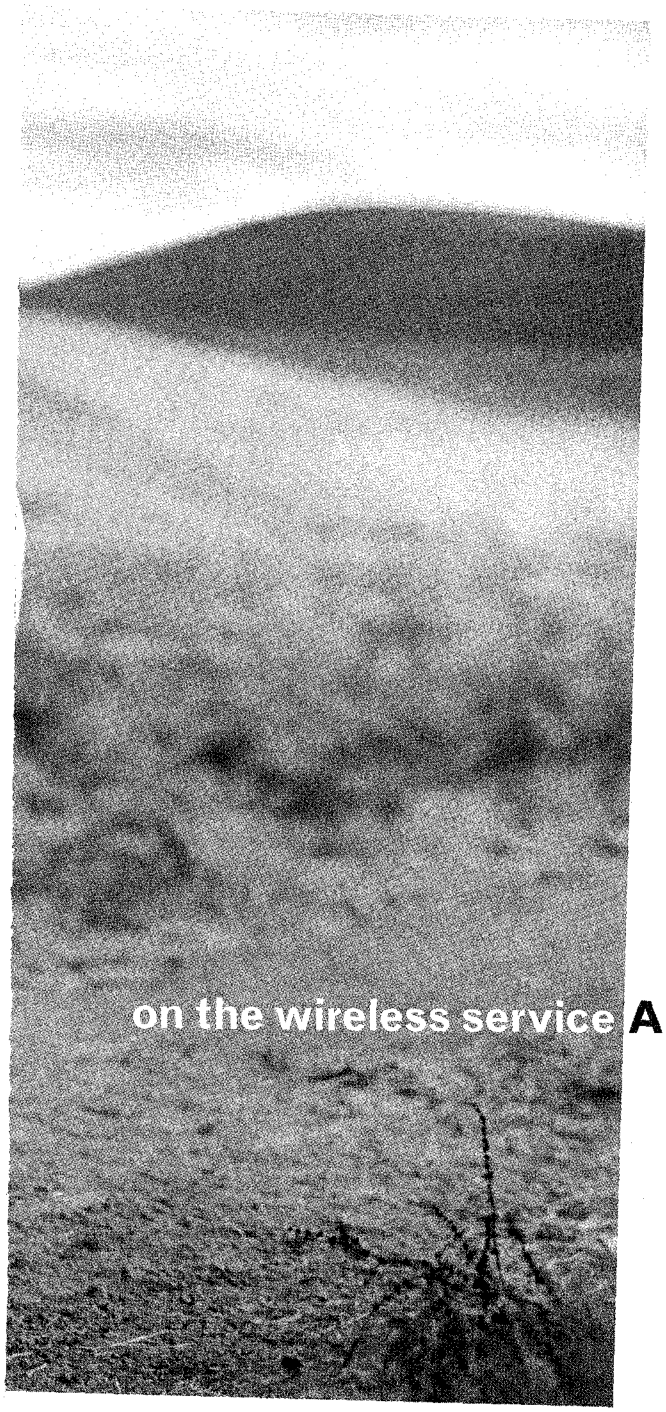

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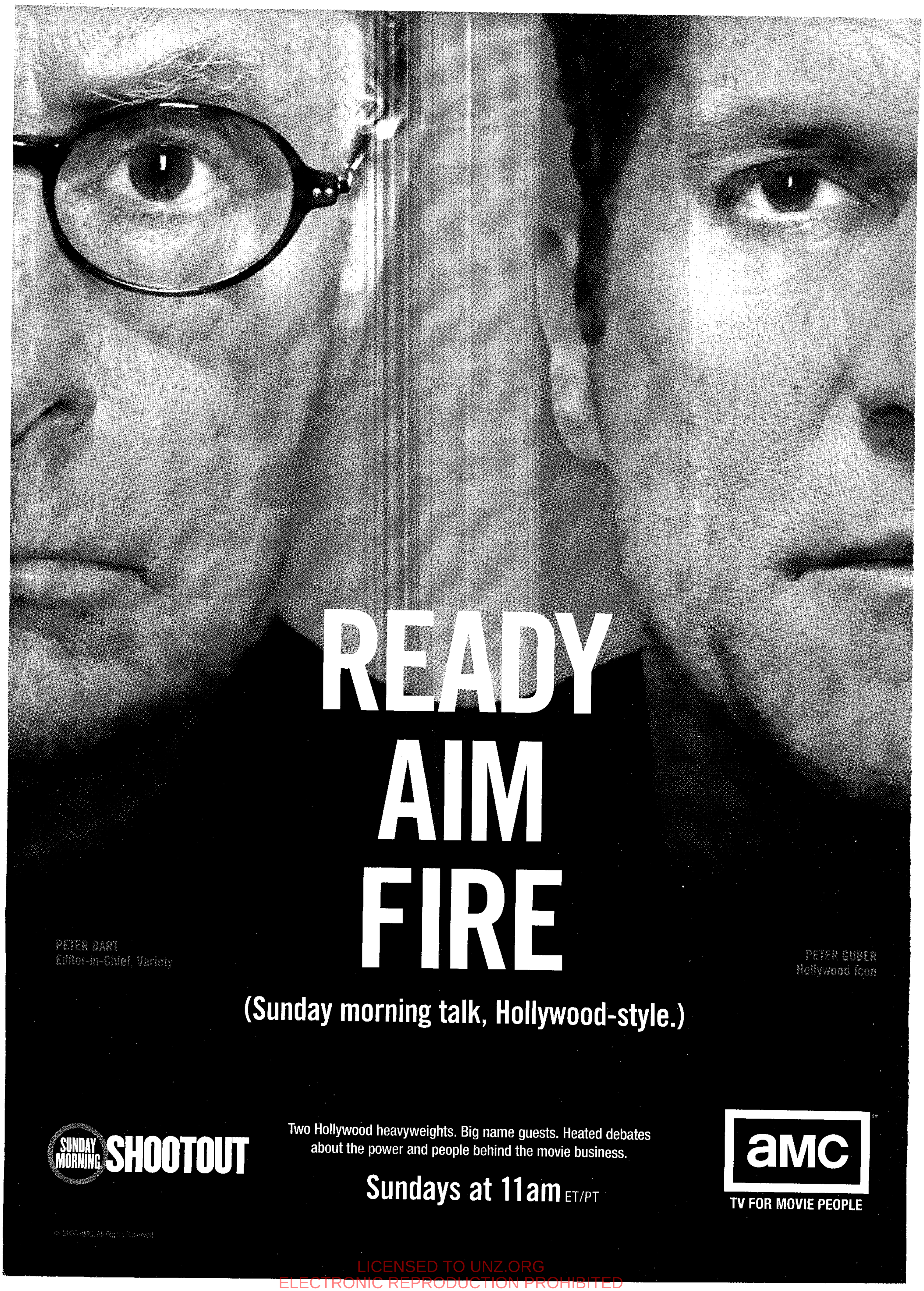

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THE NEW YORKER
MAKING MOVIES

OCTOBER 20, 2003

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II. The afternoon before their departure Katzie's car is stolen. Needing transportation, the residents invite a colleague, Daniel, to join them. Daniel accepts, but insists that his girlfriend Ronnie come with. The four depart and head north. While the journey is initially humorous, it turns increasingly difficult, both physically and emotionally. There is tension stemming from political discourse between William and Ronnie. There is heated debate between the two about the role that the young residents play in working for the apartheid government and their moral duty to work for change. Katzie and Daniel plead for moderation, but the arguments flare and finally it is too much for Ronnie, she and Daniel turn back. William and Katzie press on, hitchhiking. Arriving at the remote hunting camp they are welcomed by their patient's wife, Ann, who is they discover, having an affair with the chief guide, Peter, a black man. The doctors realize Mozambique, like the rest of the world, is not South Africa. It is a charmed week of hunting, romance and personal discovery for the boys.

YOU'VE WRITTEN YOUR TREATMENT, NOW WHAT?

THE 7 NEXT STEPS

TO BUILDING A SCREENWRITING CAREER.

IRA DEUTCHMAN. JUDGE OF **THE JOHNNIE WALKER LIVE YOUR DREAM CONTEST**

Ira Deutchman is a founder of both Cinecom and Fine Line Features. He is President and CEO of Emerging Pictures, a digital film production and exhibition company, and serves on the faculty of the Graduate Film Division at Columbia University.

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STUDY THE TRADES

Study the studios. Study producers. Study what works and write it.

LAST YEAR'S WINNING TREATMENT

"UNDER IT ALL" BY S.D. JACOBSON

1. It is 1967 and for medical residents Michael 'Katzie' and William Cathers there is growing disillusionment with South Africa's apartheid government. Their daily rotations take them from the pristine 'white only' hospitals of Johannesburg to Baragwaneth, the sprawling and chaotic hospital that serves the black community of Soweto. While they are aware of the moral ambiguities that surround their daily duties, they quietly enjoy all the benefits that their social status affords them. Besides they are only 23 years old and their energies are focused on their work and celebrating the end of the year with a summer vacation. One of their white patients, Cammora, is a Portuguese hunter who runs a private reserve in the remotest corner of western Mozambique. When he hears that the residents are planning a trip near his home he arranges for them to stay at his hunting camp.

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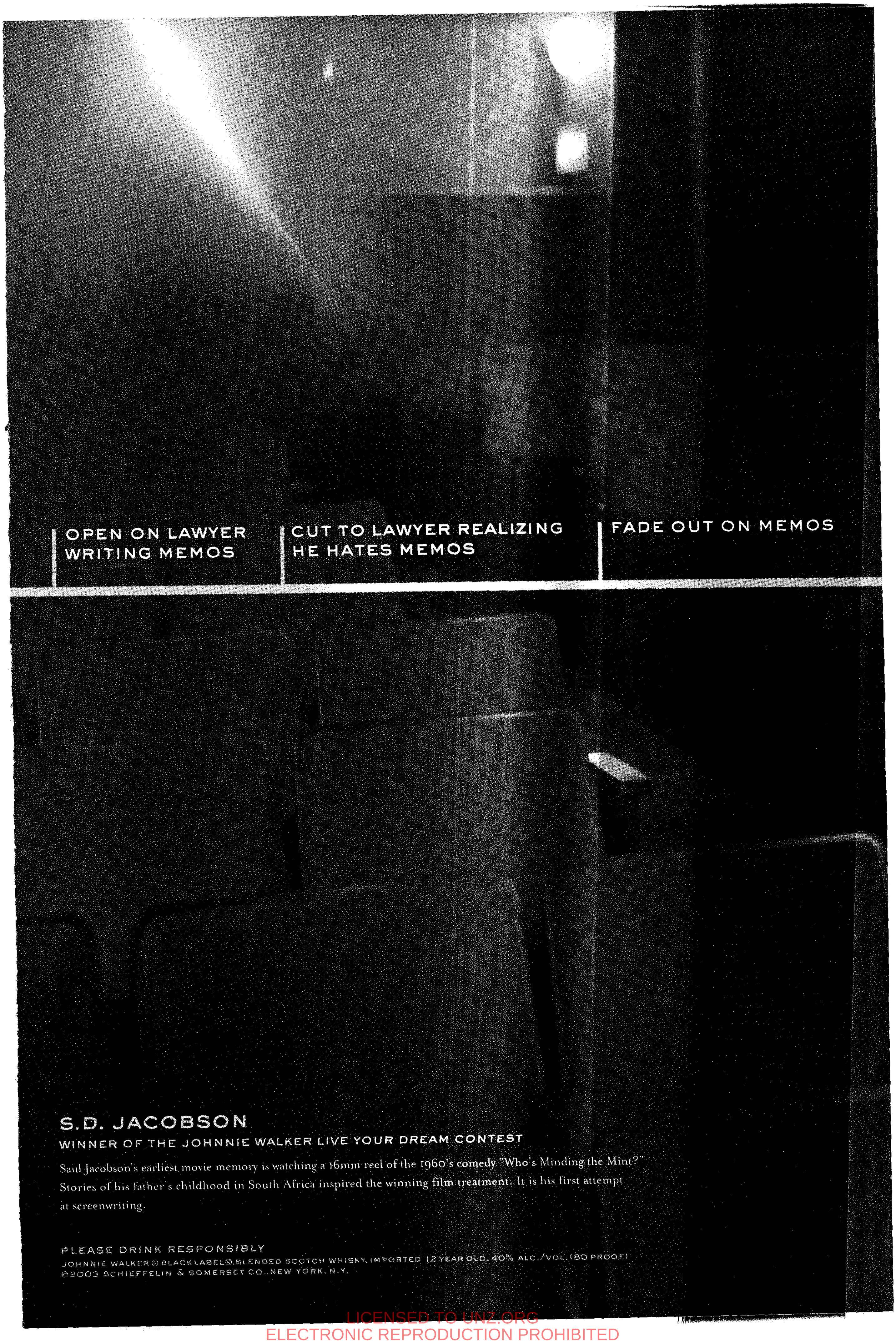
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CUT TO LAWYER REALIZING HE HATES MEMOS
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S.D. JACOBSON

WINNER OF THE JOHNNIE WALKER LIVE YOUR DREAM CONTEST

Saul Jacobson's earliest movie memory is watching a 16mm reel of the 1960's comedy "Who's Minding the Mint?" Stories of his father's childhood in South Africa inspired the winning film treatment. It is his first attempt at screenwriting.

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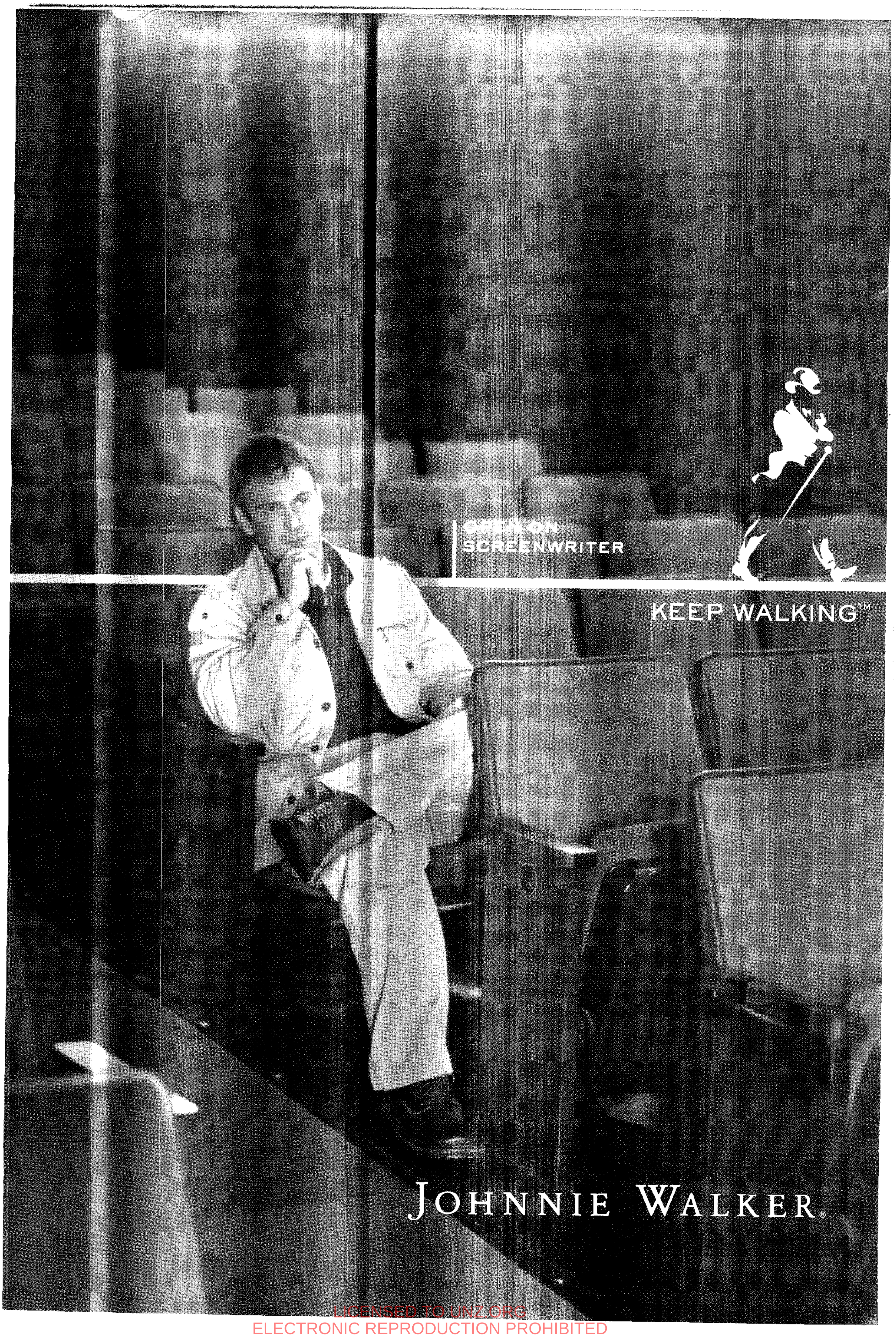
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III. Hitching home to Johannesburg is not as easy as the experience up. On the second to last night of the journey, Katzie and William are forced to camp at a South African boarder police station, whose white officers extend them every courtesy. However, the young doctors are troubled by the injuries they are asked to treat in the morning. Curiosity gets the better of them and on their last night out they hear from within the police station the sounds of a man being violently interrogated about his political activity. The boys listen impotently to the madness of apartheid unfurl in the next room and know they cannot participate in the regime. The ambiguity that William and Katzie have quietly accepted has become morally untenable. They return home in silence, but with a clear resolution to work for change.

Screenplay and film treatment adapted from the short story "Under It All" by S.D. Jacobson. Copyright 2001. All rights reserved by the author.

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An evening of Albee and Beckett.
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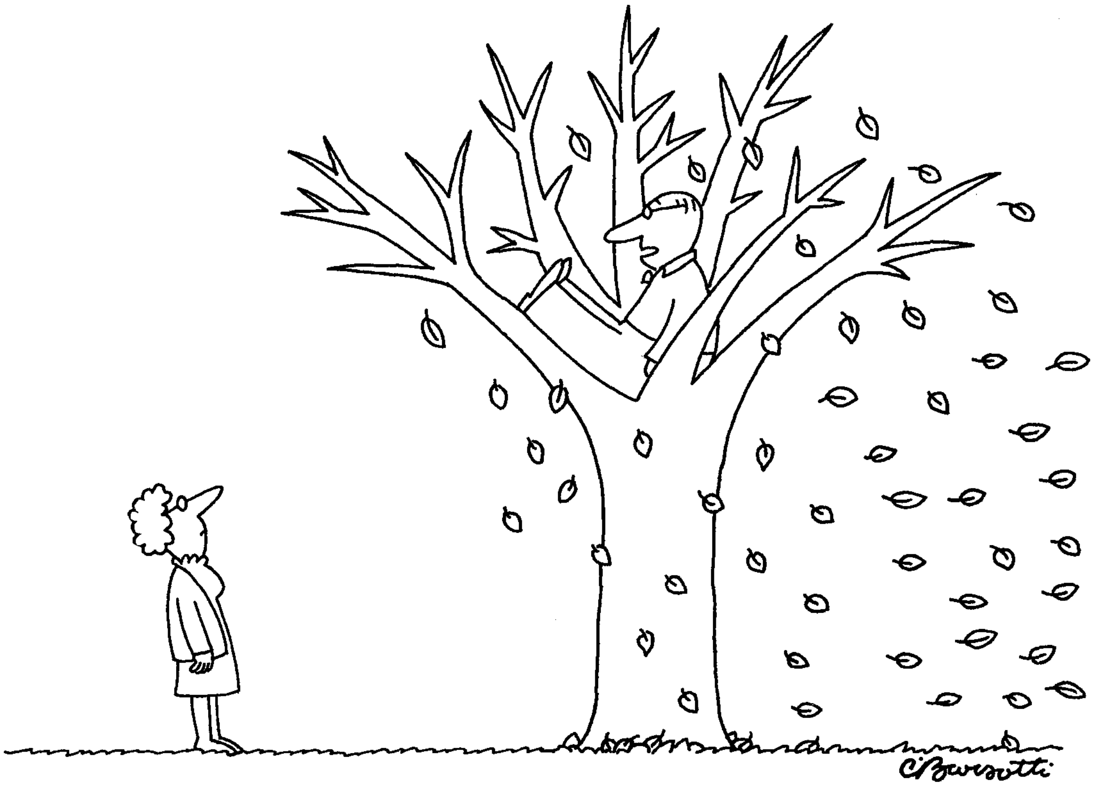
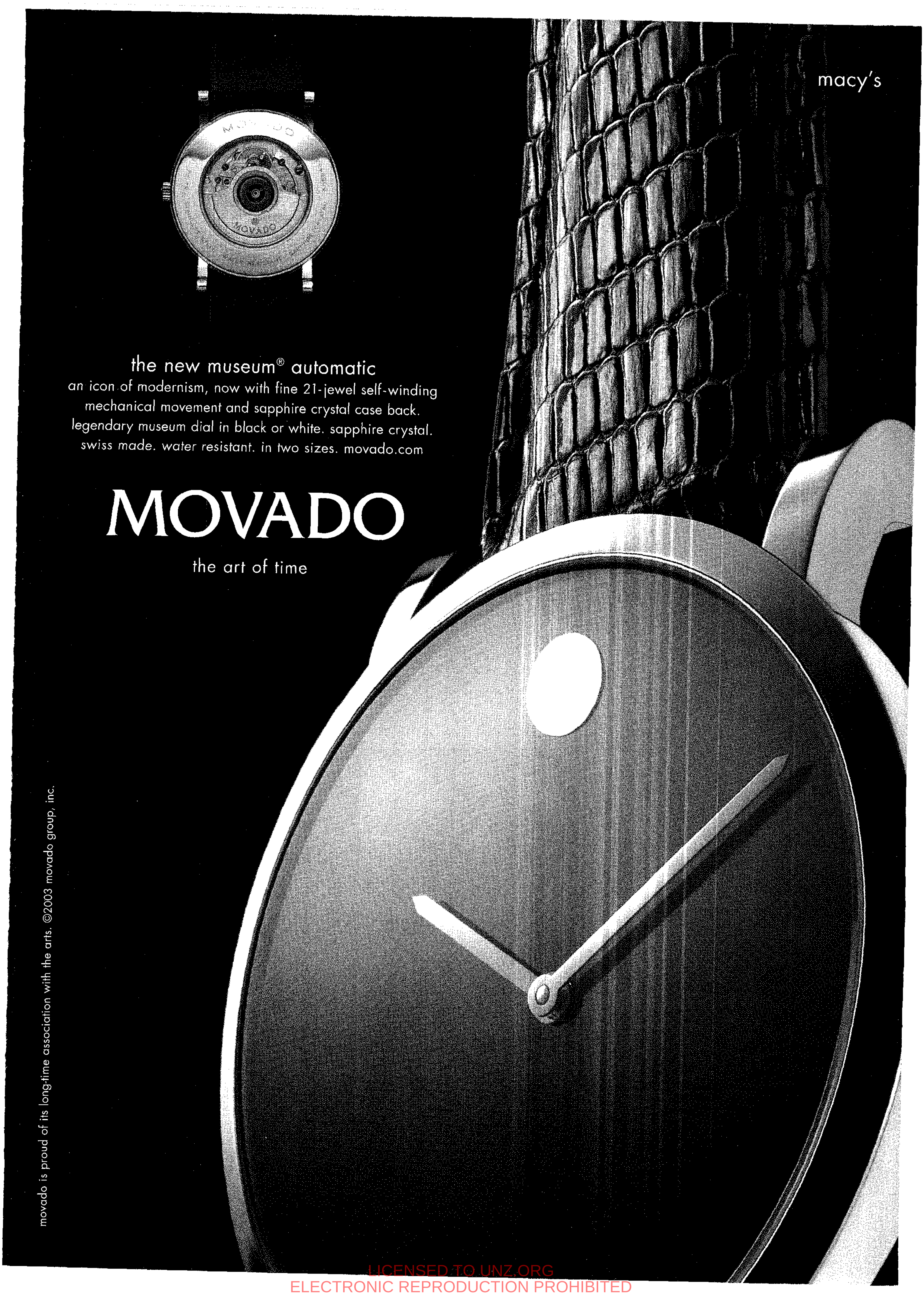


"Autumn already? O.K., I'll come down."

macy's

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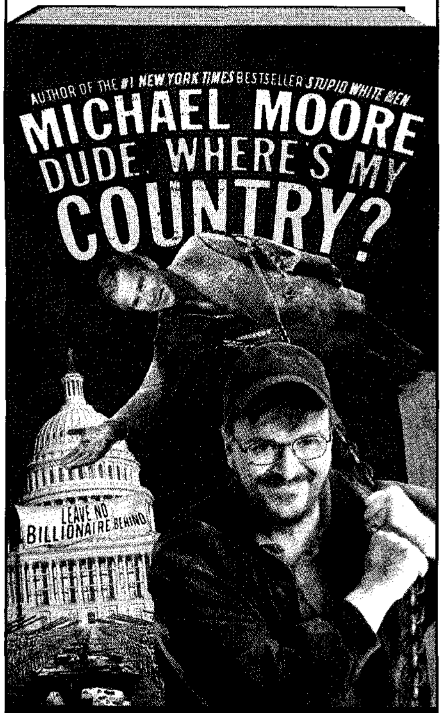
AUTHOR OF THE #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER STUPID WHITE MEN
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CONTRIBUTORS

Larissa MacFarquhar ("The Movie Lover," p. 146) has been a staff writer since 1998.

Don DeLillo ("That Day in Rome," p. 76) is the author of thirteen novels, including, most recently, "Cosmopolis."

Rebecca Mead ("The Almost It Girl," p. 96) has been writing for the magazine since 1997.

Philip Larkin (Poem, p. 84) published six collections of poems, including "Collected Poems," which was reissued in paperback in April. He also wrote fiction, essays, and jazz criticism. He died in 1985.

Kevin Conley ("The Art of the Crash," p. 115) is the author of "Stud: Adventures in Breeding," which is available in paperback.

Alec Wilkinson ("Your Face in Lights," p. 126) has a new book, "Mr. Apology and Other Essays," out this month.

Tad Friend (The Talk of the Town, p. 69; "Credit Grab," p. 160) writes the magazine's Letter from California.

David Denby ("My Life as a Paulette," p. 170), a film critic for the magazine, is the author of "Great Books" and "American Sucker," which comes out in January.

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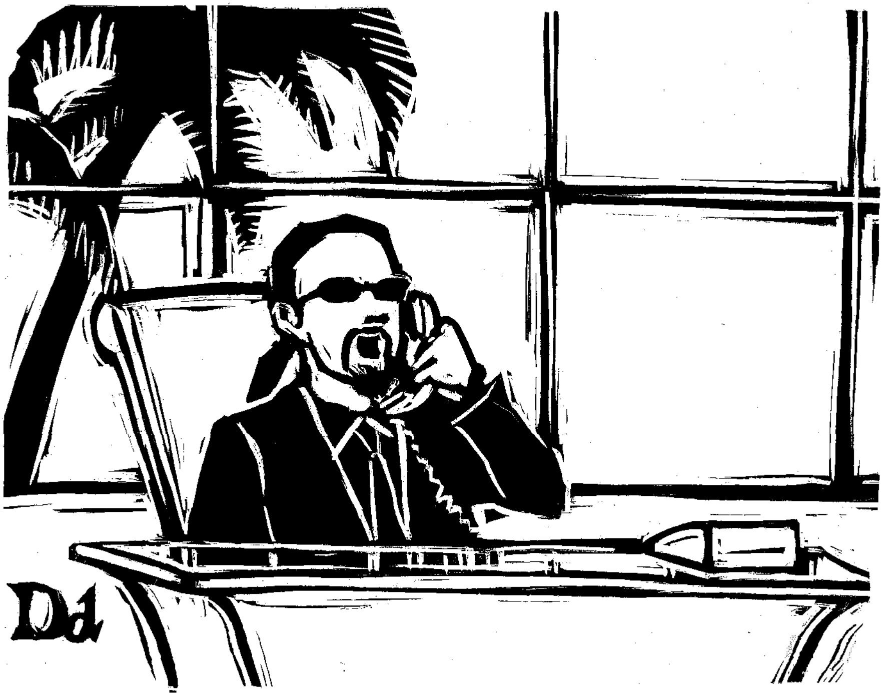
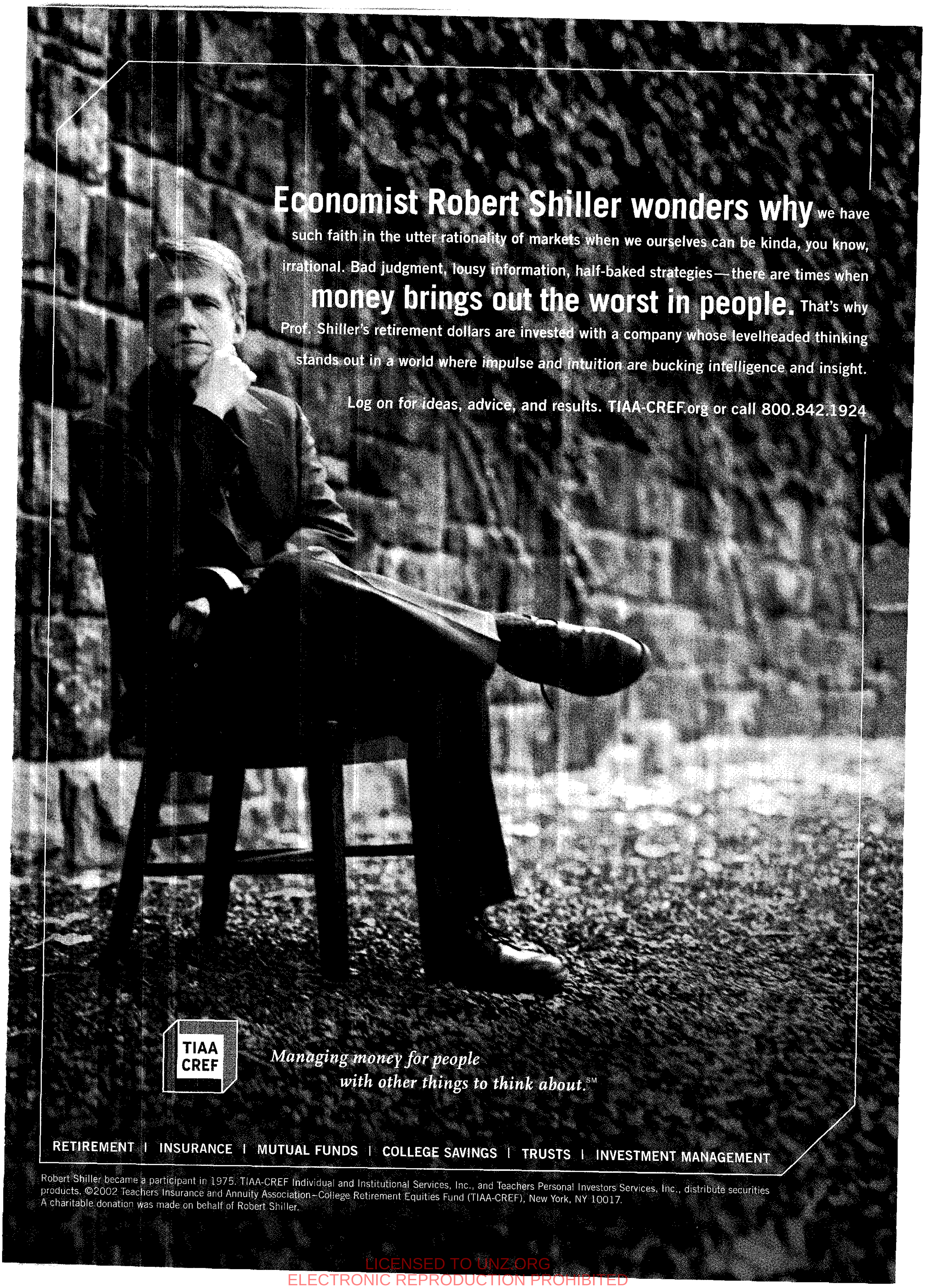
Ian Falconer (Cover) is an artist and a set and costume designer for New York City Ballet. His third children's book, "Olivia . . . and the Missing Toy," has just been published. ♦



"No movie deal yet, but Kinko's is extremely interested in the idea of making multiple copies of your screenplay."



Economist Robert Shiller wonders why we have such faith in the utter rationality of markets when we ourselves can be kinda, you know, irrational. Bad judgment, lousy information, half-baked strategies—there are times when **money brings out the worst in people.** That's why Prof. Shiller's retirement dollars are invested with a company whose levelheaded thinking stands out in a world where impulse and intuition are bucking intelligence and insight.

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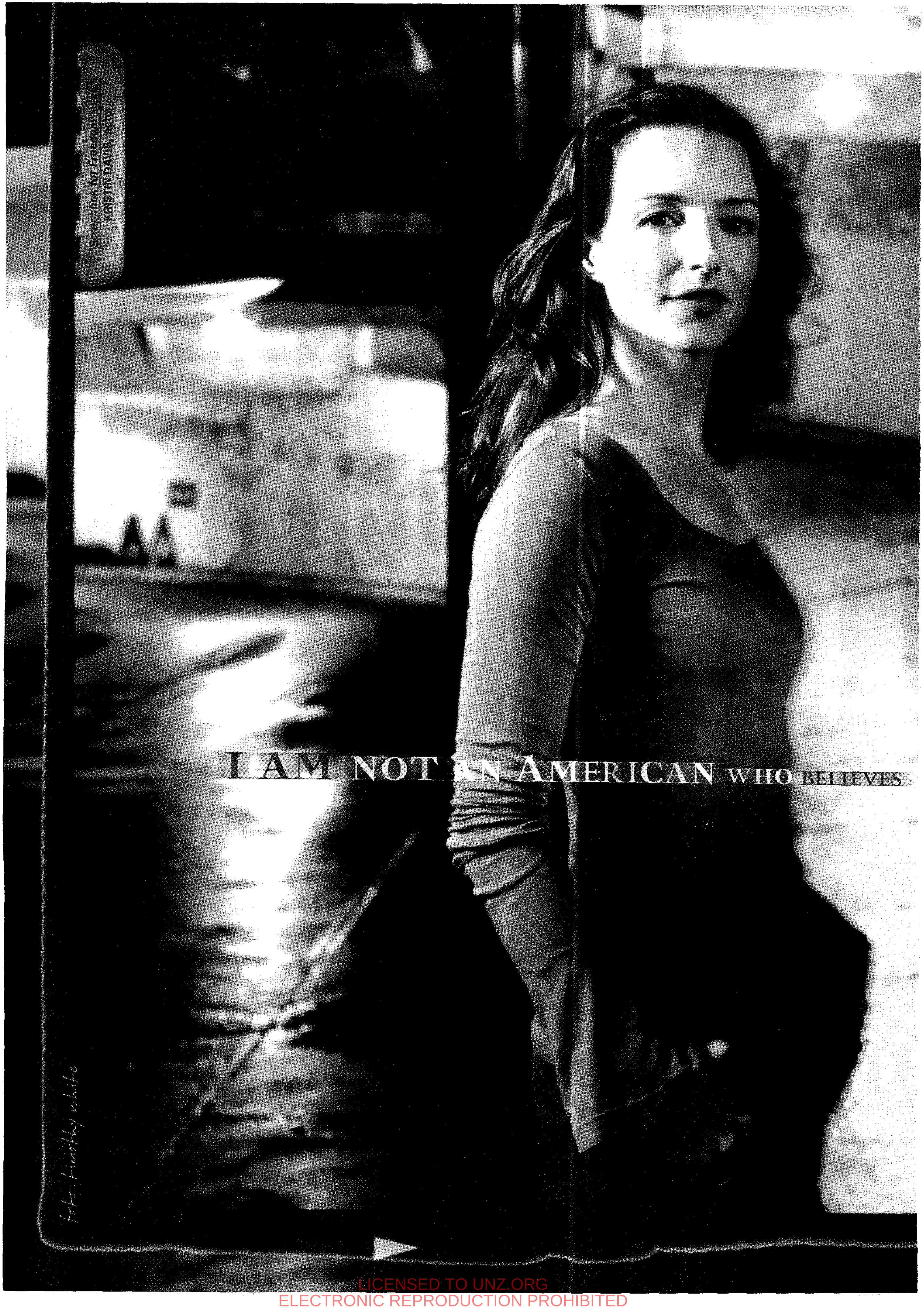
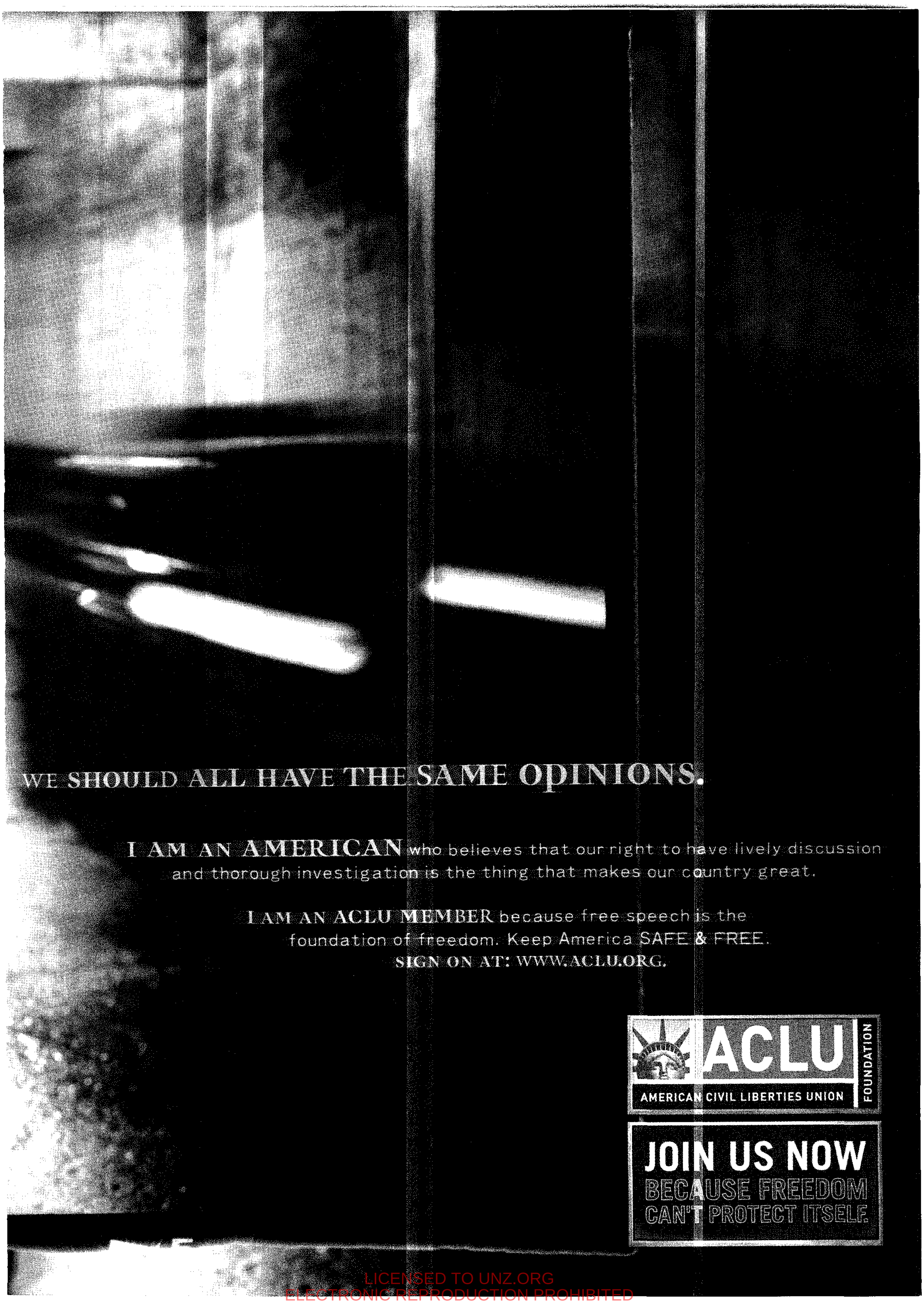
Robert Shiller became a participant in 1975. TIAA-CREF Individual and Institutional Services, Inc., and Teachers Personal Investors Services, Inc., distribute securities products. ©2002 Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association–College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF), New York, NY 10017.
A charitable donation was made on behalf of Robert Shiller.

Scrapbook for Freedom 2003
KRISTIN DAVIS, actor
I AM NOT AN AMERICAN WHO BELIEVES
foto: timothy white



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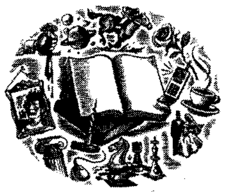

BEN SCHOTT

— HUSBANDS OF ELIZABETH TAYLOR —

Elizabeth Taylor (1932–) has had eight marriages and seven husbands.

Nicky Hilton	1950-1	Ricahrd Burton	1964-74, 1975-6
Michael Wilding	1952-7	John Warner	1976-82
Michael Todd	1957-8	Larry Fortensky	1991-6
Eddie Fisher	1959-64	*[Complete to January 2003]*	

— PIG LATIN HAMLET —

Otay ebay, orway otnay otay ebay: atthay isway ethay estionquay:
Etherwhay 'istay oblernay inway ethay indmay otay uffersay
Ethay ingsslay andway arrowsway ofway outrageousway ortunefay,
Orway otay aketay armsway againstway away easay ofway oublestray,
Andway ybay opposingway endway emthay?

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?

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1975	*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*	Milos Forman
1991	*The Silence of the Lambs*	Jonathan Demme

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WHEN RUSSIANS TALK DIRTY

Victor Erofeyev's article on *mat,* Russian obscene speech, took me back to 1944-1945, when I was a thirteen-year-old Jewish prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp near Buchenwald ("Dirty Words," September 15th). We Jews labored together with Soviet P.O.W.s. Coming from the Hungarian-occupied part of Yugoslavia, I spoke Serbian, and quickly learned the language of the Russian, Uzbek, and Chechen soldiers. Young as I was, I had no clue that what they spoke was pure *mat.* After I was liberated, and resumed school in Yugoslavia, where Russian was now an obligatory subject, my teachers quickly made it clear that the language I had learned in the camp was not acceptable in the classroom.

Steven J. Fenves
Rockville, Md.

Although I am a young, urban woman, born and raised in St. Petersburg, I would prefer to be classed among the the old, provincial women, who, according to Erofeyev, are the ones who oppose the spread of *mat* in every sphere of Russian life. One of the few things that I appreciated about the Soviet period was the precise language used on television and radio and by writers and journalists. Today, it's hard to find a newspaper or a book written in good Russian. I have grown almost nostalgic for the dry but correct language of the Soviet past. Russians who like dirty language in sex are welcome to use *mat* for this purpose. But *mat* is not connected to the dissident movement or to underground culture, and its usage does not signify freedom or an effort to improve democracy. It's just dirty.

Luba Mitnik-Gankin
Lexington, Mass.

Erofeyev, in his essay on *mat,* relies in some cases on folk etymologies that have been called into question by academic scholarship. For example, he connects *yebat'* ("to fuck") and *bit'* ("to beat"). But the root of *yebat'* is **yebh-*, with cognates in Sanskrit *yábhati* ("he fucks") and probably Greek *oíphō* ("I fuck"). The verb *bit'* ("to beat, hit, strike") and its derivatives, in contrast, are ultimately traced back to **bheiH-*, and can be compared with the Avestan *biiente* ("they fight, beat"); the Old Irish *-bíth* ("was struck"); and the German *das Beil* ("hatchet"). Likewise, the Russian word *pizda* ("cunt") is probably related not to *pisat'* ("to piss") but to *bzdet'* ("to fart"), both linked to earlier **pezd-* ("to break wind") and cognate with Greek *bdéō* (from earlier *bzdéō*) and Latin *pēdō*, as suggested in Pokorny's authoritative etymological dictionary. Although the word *mat* is, as Erofeyev notes, commonly associated with Russian *mat'* ("mother") because of the ubiquitous *yob tvoyu mat'* ("fuck you," lit. "fucked your mother"), there is no unequivocal (or even convincing) etymology for this word. Folk etymologies have cultural resonance, of course. But *mat* is, in fact, serious business.

Michael S. Flier
Professor of Ukrainian Philology
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

In "The Gulag Archipelago," Alexander Solzhenitsyn writes, "Whatever infectious things are born in the Archipelago—as concerns interpersonal relations, morals, views, and language . . . spread throughout the entire country. . . . And when camp language rings in the halls of Moscow State University, or a cosmopolitan, independent woman articulates a convict's philosophy of life—don't be surprised." Now *mat* is the language of liberal intellectuals, as Erofeyev attests; subculture has been made level with culture, or, rather, the other way around. So there is the liberation we're left with—free of all conventions, recalling pre-social times, but without the primordial innocence.

Julia Flyagina
New York City

•

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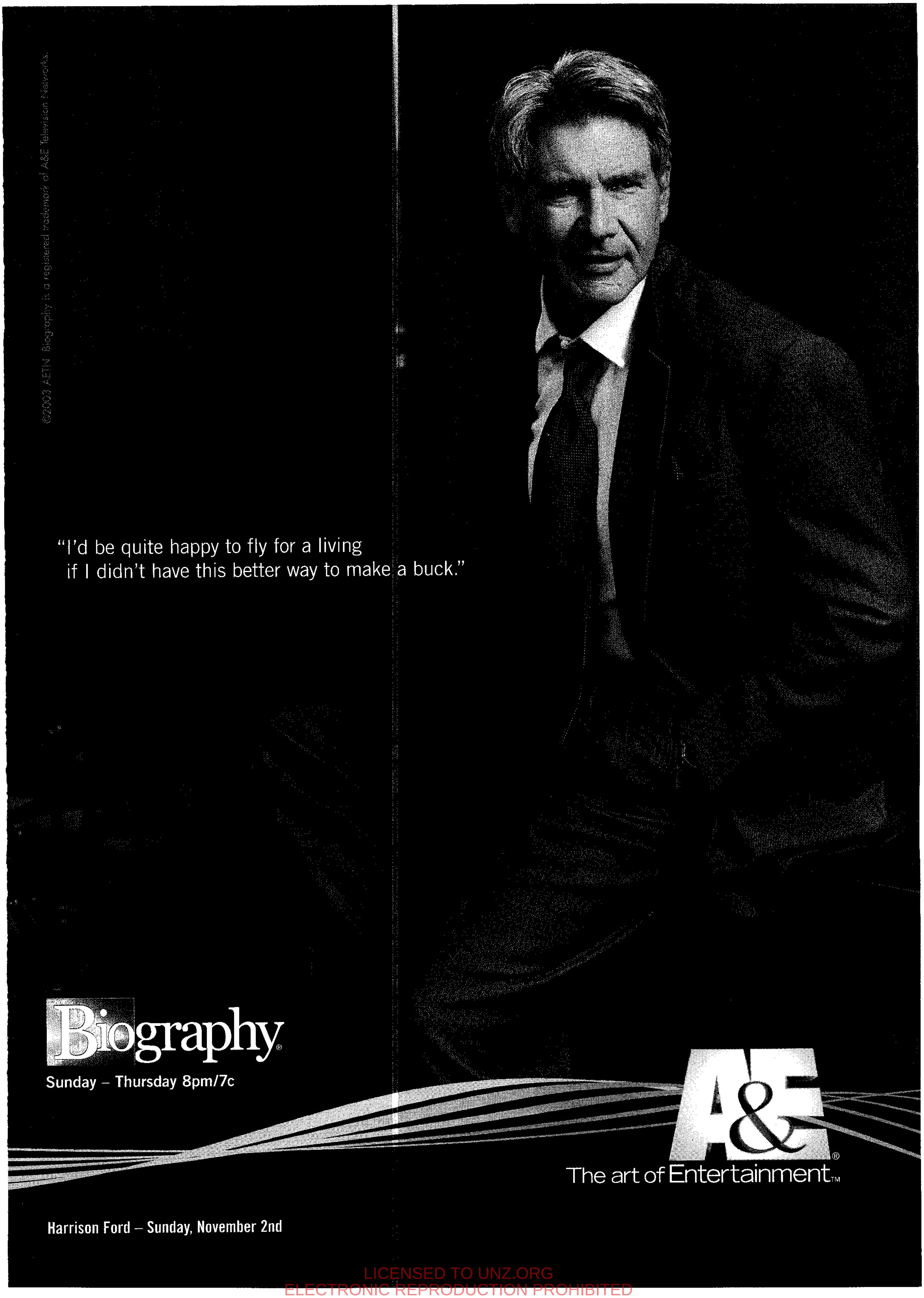
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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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BEYOND RECOGNITION
Chris Burns, Michael Goduti, Michael Marisi Orenstein, and Grant James Vargas star in a new play by John Petrick about a man who survives a brutal beating in Central Park. Directed by Kate Bushmann. Previews begin Oct. 17. (Abingdon Theatre Arts Complex, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

BOBRAUSCHENBERGAMERICA
In a theatrical production created by Charles Mee and performed by SITI Company, the life and times of the postmodern American painter are reprised in a collagist whirl of bright colors, stars and stripes, plastic sheeting, and bikinis. Directed by Anne Bogart. Oct. 14-18. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

THE BOY FROM OZ
Hugh Jackman stars in a new musical about the Australian pop star Peter Allen, in which Stephanie J. Block plays Liza Minnelli and Beth Fowler plays Allen's mother. Directed by Philip Wm. McKinley and choreographed by Joey McKneely, with a book by Martin Sherman ("Bent") and music and lyrics by Allen and others. Two previews on Oct. 15. Opens Oct. 16 at 6:45. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF
Ashley Judd, Jason Patric, and Ned Beatty star in a new production of Tennessee Williams's drama, directed by Anthony Page. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COLLEEN BAWN
The Irish Rep presents a turn-of-the-last-century melodrama by Dion Boucicault about two sisters who join a travelling show in County Kerry. Directed by Charlotte Moore. In previews. Opens Oct. 19 at 7. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

FAME ON 42ND STREET
The movie that became a television series now becomes a musical, with a book by José Fernandez, lyrics by Jacques Levy, and music by Steve Margoshes. Directed by Drew Scott Harris and choreographed by Lars Bethke. In previews. (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY
Tovah Feldshuh is Golda Meir in William Gibson's play about the Israeli Prime Minister, which now moves to Broadway after a successful run at the Manhattan Ensemble Theatre. Directed by Scott Schwartz. Opens Oct. 15 at 7. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

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GONE MISSING
The quirky downtown theatre group the Civilians reinvent the reality show in a production that blends documentary interviews and musical cabaret. Directed by Steven Cosson, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman and additional text by Peter Morris. In previews. Opens Oct. 16 at 8. (Zipper's Belt Theatre, 336 W. 37th St. 212-868-4444.)

IRON
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new drama by Rona Munro about a woman who resolves to see her mother, who has been in prison for fifteen years. Directed by Anna D. Shapiro. In previews. Opens Oct. 21 at 7:30. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE LAST RESORT; OR, FARBLONDJET
The Epic Repertory, a new theatre company under the artistic direction of Richard Kuranda and Carolyn Craig, kicks off its first season with a comedy by Jeremy Kareken about a young man looking for love in the Catskills. Opens Oct. 16 at 8. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME
A new play by Paula Vogel ("How I Learned to Drive") uses Bunraku-inspired puppets, designed by Basil Twist, to help tell the story of three siblings who hurtle into the future after a post-Christmas-dinner car accident. Randy Graff and Enid Graham lead the cast. Directed by Mark Brokaw, with sets by Neil Patel. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW
Eileen Atkins, John Lithgow, and Ben Chaplin star in a new play by William Nicholson, about a man who walks out on his marriage. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SACRAMENT OF MEMORY
The life of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (a.k.a. La Petite Fleur), a French Carmelite nun who died at twenty-four and was canonized for her unassuming ways, is presented in a play by the Blackfriars Repertory Theatre. Previews begin Oct. 16. Opens Oct. 17 at 8. Through Oct. 26. Written and directed by Peter John Cameron. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. For more information, call 718-921-1348.)

SILVER NITRATE
The Juggernaut Theatre Company presents a new play by Cathy Caplan, set in the Weimar era, about a group of photographers who are forced out of artistic isolation and into political involvement by changing times. Directed by Gwynn MacDonald. In previews. Opens Oct. 21 at 8. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 212-868-4444.)

SIX DANCE LESSONS IN SIX WEEKS
Polly Bergen and Mark Hamill star in a new play by Richard Alfieri, about a friendship between a vivacious Florida retiree and the dance teacher she hires, a jaded former New Yorker. Directed by Arthur Allan Seidelman. In previews. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

STRICTLY ACADEMIC
A. R. Gurney presents a convoluted comedy of letters, starring Remy Auberjonois, Susan Greenhill, and Keith Reddin. Directed by Paul Benedict. In previews. Opens Oct. 21 at 7. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 212-333-4052.)

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN
The Public Theatre begins its season with a production of a rarely produced Shakespeare play which the Bard co-wrote with John Fletcher. David Harbour stars. In previews. Opens Oct. 19 at 7. Directed by Darko Tresnjak. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

THE VIOLET HOUR
A new play by Richard Greenberg ("Take Me Out"), about a young publisher and a mysterious machine, stars Robert Sean Leonard, Jasmine Guy, Scott Foley, Dagmara Dominczyk, and Mario Cantone. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. Previews begin Oct. 16. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WICKED
Kristin Chenoweth, Idina Menzel, Norbert Leo Butz, Carole Shelley, and Joel Grey star in a new musical by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman, based on Gregory Maguire's novel about the witches of Oz. Directed by Joe Mantello, with musical staging by Wayne Cilento. In previews. (Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.)

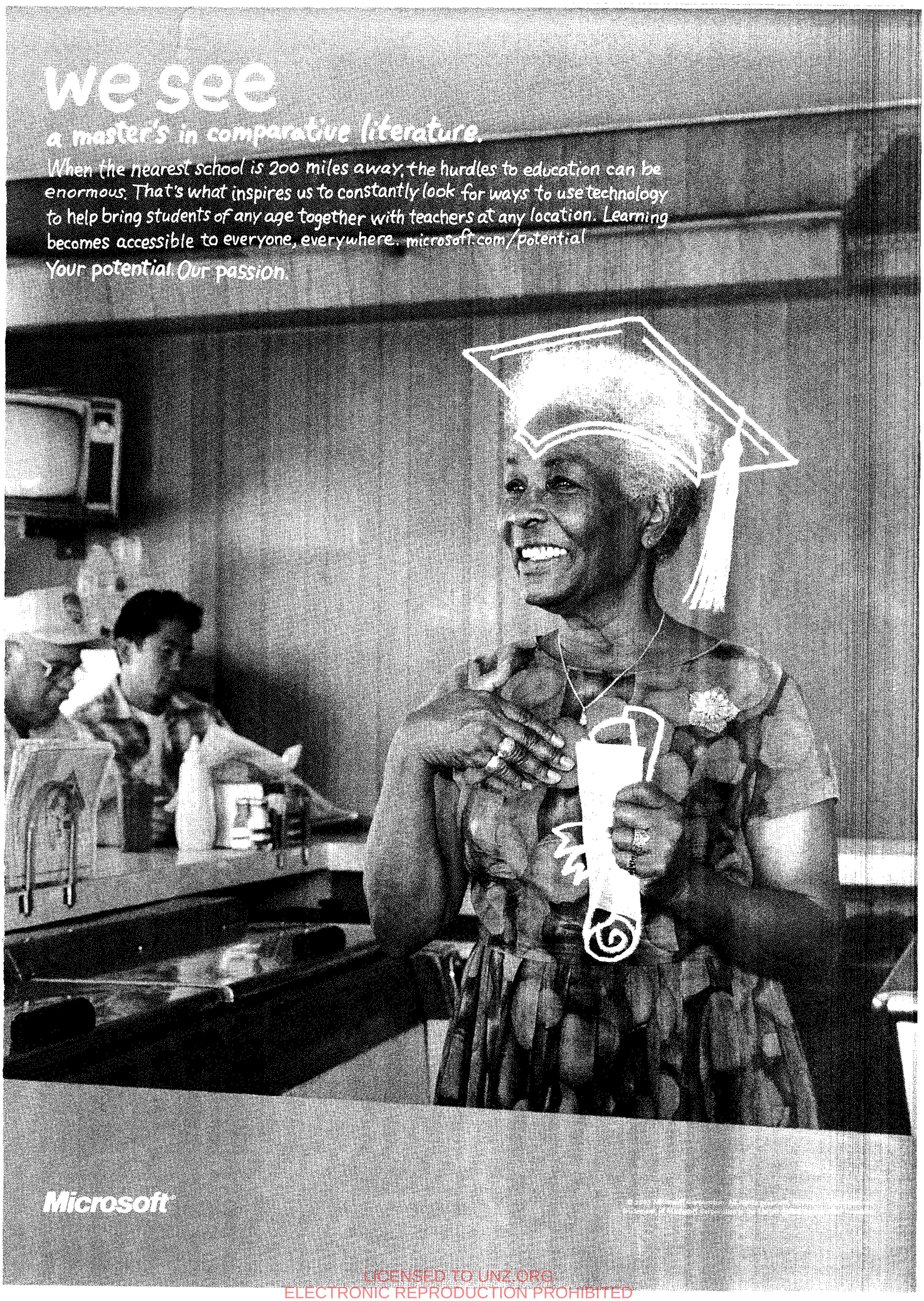
WILDER
A man who grew up in a bordello reflects on his lurid youth in a new musical by Erin Cressida Wilson, Jack Herrick, and Mike Craver. John Cullum stars. Directed by Lisa Portes. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BECKETT/ALBEE
Marian Seldes and Brian Murray perform an evening of one-act plays by Samuel Beckett and Edward Albee, including Beckett's "Not I," "Footfalls," and "A Piece of Monologue" and Albee's "Counting the Ways." Lawrence Sacharow directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

BOLD GIRLS
Rona Munro's play depicts a day in the lives of four women struggling through life with absent men, too

WILLIAM STEIG, 4/18/83



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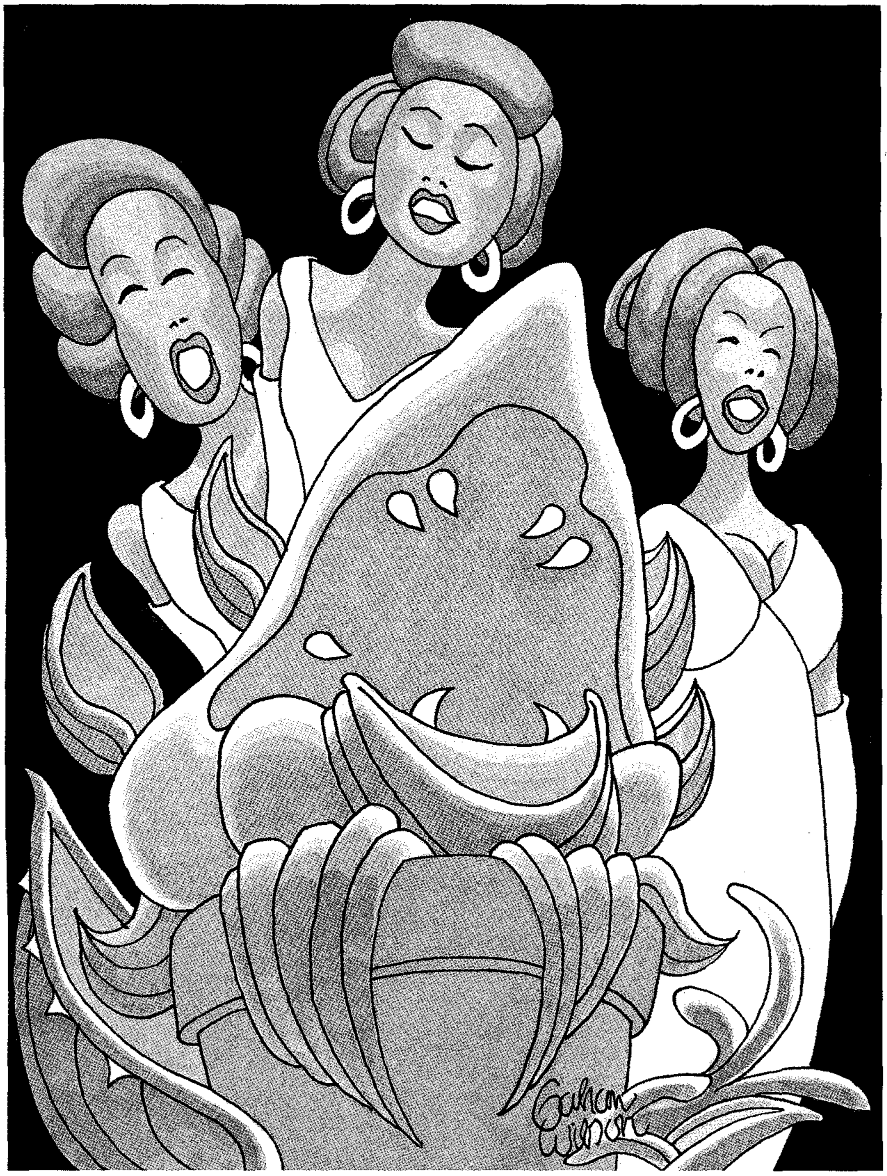


Audrey II and the girl-group trio in "Little Shop of Horrors," at the Virginia Theatre.

GAHAN WILSON

little money, and too much violence. Often wrenching, it's just as often funny. And Munro occasionally allows her characters an almost novelistic luxury with language, especially in the play's few monologues; this makes the play seem universal even while it's utterly real and firmly set in nineteen-nineties Belfast. Directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser. (29th Street Rep, 212 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444. Closes Nov. 1.)

THE CITY

The Metropolitan Playhouse's twelfth season begins with a revival of Clyde Fitch's 1909 hit, a neat tale of temptation and redemption in New York. Shockingly explicit in its time, the play's depiction of good people slipping into very bad behavior, particularly in business, is still engaging. Directed by Yvonne Conybeare. (220 E. 4th St. 212-995-5302. Closes Oct. 25.)

CLOSET CHRONICLES

In a comedy by Eric R. Pfeffinger, told from the point of view of a teen-age girl, embarrassing family secrets emerge at three holiday gatherings. With Marilyn Sokol, Richard Leighton, Brandon Malone, Jason Cicci, Ben Hersey, and Emilie Madison. Ben Hodges directs. (Ground Floor Theatre, 312 W. 11th St., between Greenwich and Hudson Sts. 212-352-3101. Closes Nov. 2.)

COOKIN'

Four Korean cooks scramble to create a seven-course wedding banquet in one hour, in a comic theatrical import from Seoul that blends martial arts, Samulnori drumming, and dance. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Closes Oct. 19.)

THE COURTESAN TALES

Those who wish to experience Nicole Blackman's one-on-one show, which combines fairy tale, lap dance, and haunted-house stories, must submit to being blindfolded and having their hands loosely tied. Performances are by appointment only. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288.)

CUPID AND PSYCHE

In this musical comedy based on the classical myth, Cupid (the golden-haired Barrett Foa) falls in love with Psyche (Deborah Lew), the most beautiful woman in the world—which would be a good thing if not for the raging jealousy of Cupid's mother, Venus (Laura Marie Duncan). Duncan, with great comic verve, plays Venus as a full-blown diva, a little bit Liza, a little bit soap star. Timothy Childs directs. (John Houseman Studio, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-868-4444. Closes Oct. 26.)

FAR AND WIDE

In Jonathan Bank's deft adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's cruelly blithe 1911 drama about civilized infidelity, the characters let their hearts go out to play and receive them back badly bruised. The production, directed by Bank, has returned to the Mint after a successful run last spring. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-279-4200.)

GOLF

Joel Blum leads the cast in a musical revue about golf, with music and lyrics by Michael Roberts. Directed by Christopher Scott. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE HARLEQUIN STUDIES

At a mere seventy-five minutes, Bill Irwin's new show feels interminable. For the great low comedians who carried the harlequin tradition into the twentieth century—Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harpo and Groucho Marx—clowning was an act of revenge; for Irwin, who pays homage to a few of them in the show, which he wrote, it is an act of nostalgia. The cavorting Merry-Andrews whom Irwin rightly admires saw themselves as businessmen; they achieved art in spite of themselves. Irwin, on the other hand, thinks only of art, and he can't approach it. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/6/03.) (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

JANE

The Peccadillo Theatre Company's revival of S. N. Behrman's 1952 tale about a London socialite who is undone by the visit of a meddling relative is sparklingly directed by Dan Wackerman, with a great sense of comedic pace and an eye for telling gesture. The play is packed with sharp one-liners that expose the reverberant shallowness of the characters' social world. Unfortunately, Behrman's uneven script contains longueurs that the talented director can't hide, and he is not helped by the generally flat cast. Only Mort Kroos, as a nearly silent butler, and Roland Johnson, as a parody of the press magnate Lord Beaverbrook, consistently create a comic snap on a par with the script at its best. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-561-9635. Closes Oct. 26.)

LIFE INTERRUPTED

In his newest monologue, Spalding Gray recounts the aftermath of his sixtieth birthday, from road accidents in Ireland to moving into a new house in Sag Harbor to 9/11. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288.)

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

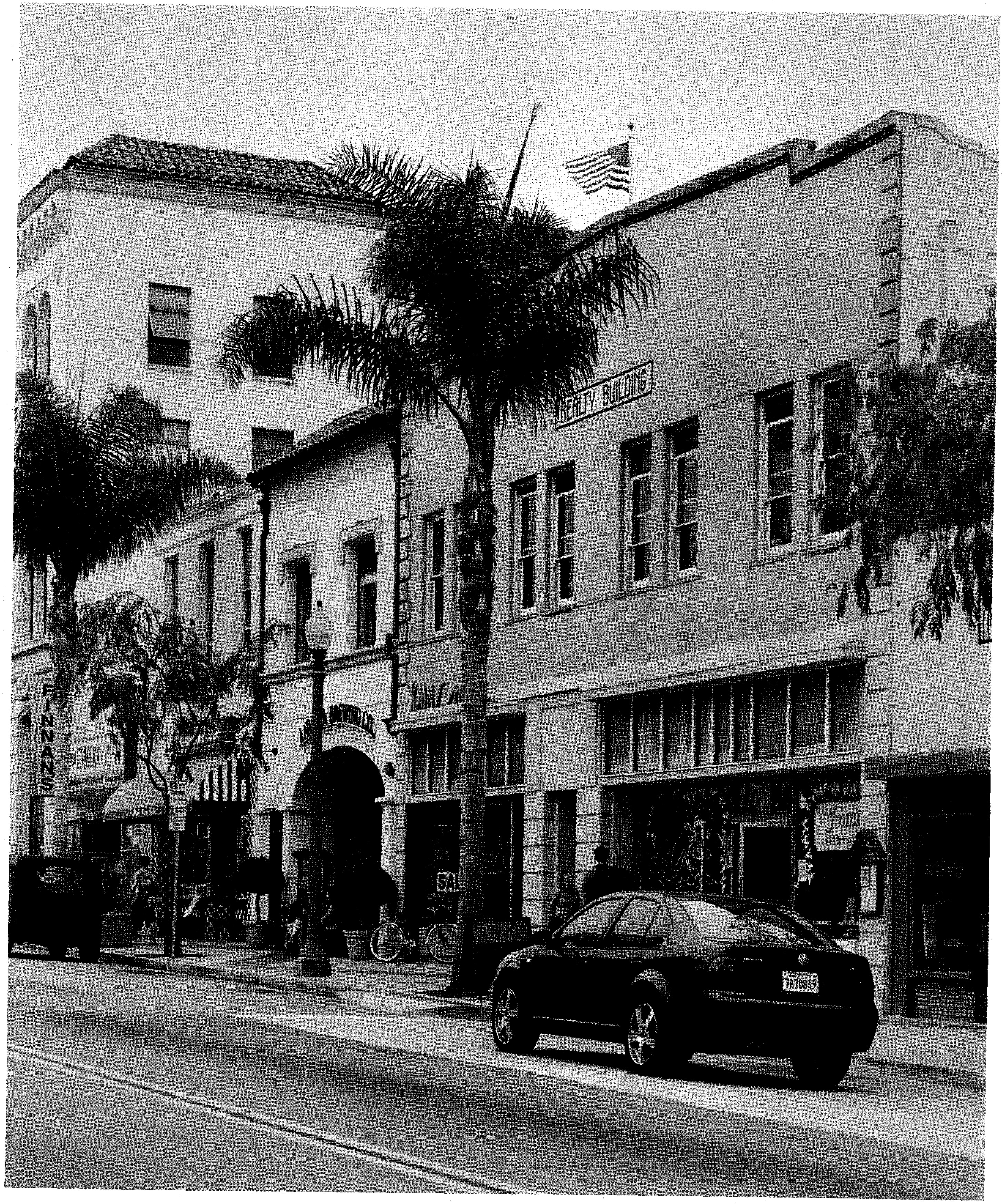
A buoyantly macabre musical about a florist who finds a plant from outer space that wins him fame and the love of a dopey blonde named Audrey, "Little Shop" was a hit from its début, in 1982, and played more than two thousand performances Off Broadway. But only now has it made the leap to Broadway—and what a leap! In a stirring début at the Virginia, Audrey II—the play's bloodthirsty, leafy star—goes airborne, shooting over the heads of the audience, green jaws clacking. Howard Ashman's vivacious, jaded book and Alan Menken's catchy score are as appealing as ever, and the cast is splendid. Hunter Foster plays the nebbishy florist with winning humor; Kerry Butler is terrific as his tawdry inamorata; Douglas Sills shines both as her sadistic dentist boyfriend and in a handful of juicy character roles; and a girl-group trio keeps the energy level cranked up. Directed by Jerry Zaks. (245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200.)

LIVING OUT

Second Stage begins its twenty-fifth season with a stellar new play by Lisa Loomer about mothers and nannies. Centered on the relationship between a go-getter entertainment lawyer, Nancy Robin (Kathryn Meisle), and Ana, her El Salvadoran "caregiver" (Nancy is too progressive to use the word "nanny"), the play also features rival choruses of blond mommies and dark-haired nannies, who reveal the resentments that seethe among them in searingly funny snatches of dialogue, many of them in Spanish. Zilah Mendoza gives an excellent, touching performance as Ana, who must hide the fact that she has a young son at home in order to get her job and who uncomplainingly lavishes the maternal love she can't afford to give her own child on Nancy's daughter. The supporting cast is excellent, notably Liza Colón-Zayas, as a salty-talking, childishly innocent nanny, and Judith Hawking, as an obscenely self-delighted society matron. With a versatile set by Neil Patel and flawless direction by Jo Bonney. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

The Queen's Company, an all-female troupe, has mounted a fun and frivolous new production of Shakespeare's mischievous love story that makes surprisingly little of the cross-casting and doesn't offer much insight, opting instead to stress the play's inherent silliness. Within those bounds, however, it's a charming evening: the actresses understand Shakespeare's language and adroitly put across his jokes, and the director, Rebecca Patterson, insures that there's a great deal of physical humor. The lively cast is led by DeeAnn Weir, as Benedick, and Zainab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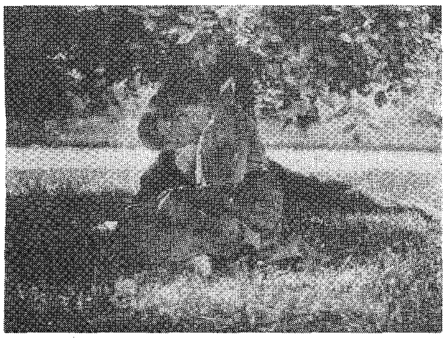

Gertrude Käsebier. Untitled (Hermine Käsebier and William Turner), 1902. Gum bichromate on laid paper. University Gallery Collection, University of Delaware. Gift of Mason E. Turner, Jr.

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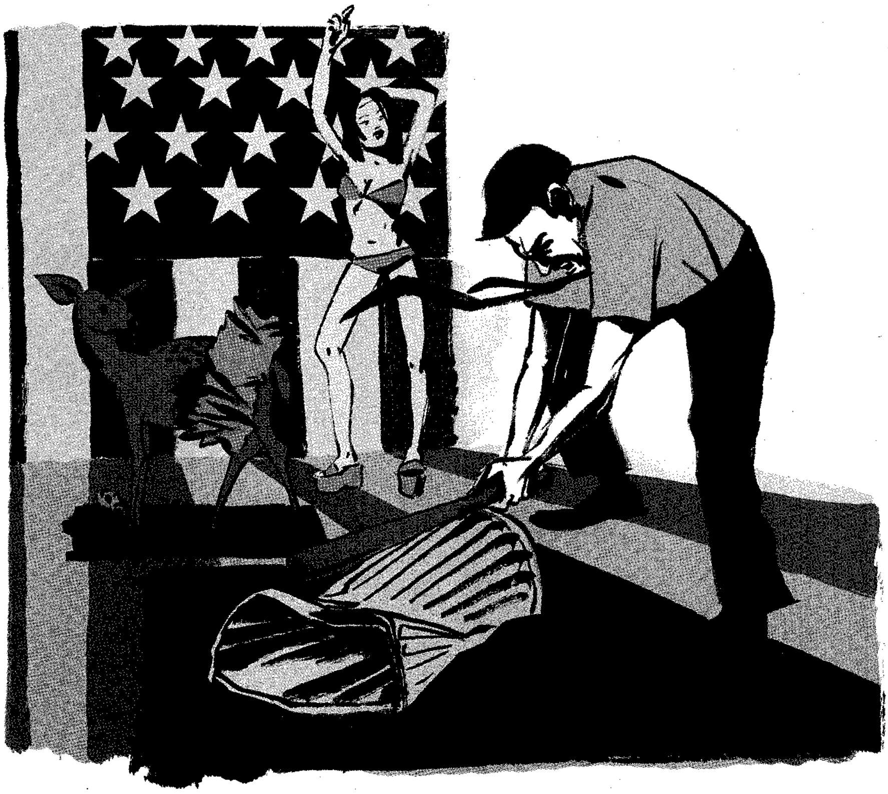
Jah, as Beatrice and as a constable given to malapropisms. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444. Closes Oct. 26.)

THE NIGHT HERON
The female mullet gets an airing in a peculiar new play by Jez Butterworth ("Mojo") that lands a stentorian lady ex-con, Bolla (Mary McCann), in the ramshackle cottage of two down-and-outers in the Cambridge Fens—Wattmore (Chris Bauer), who is suicidally depressed, and Griffin (Clark Gregg), who is erratic and violent. Butterworth's powers of invention tread a lurching line between admirable and excessive. His menacing, homoerotic subtext recalls early Pinter ("The Caretaker"), but a tenderness in the rapport between the characters and the relish taken in circumstances that go from bad to absurd to worse betray the play's roots in the conventions of the British sitcom—so much bleaker than the American version. It is a credit to the seven-member American cast that they make this unlikely bunch of Britons seem real—particularly Bauer, who not only speaks but moves like an Englishman who has just about given up—and the subtle regional accents they deliver are exceptionally good. Confidently directed by Neil Pepe. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

OMNIUM GATHERUM
The intention of Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros's witty, pugnacious play, which opens to the sound of a low-flying chopper and the sight of a sumptuous Manhattan dinner party, is to punch the lights out of every intellectual pose. Under the confident and precocious direction of Will Frears, "Omnium Gatherum" is full of polemicists, but it is not itself a polemic. It is, more accurately, a provocation—a show of theatrical fireworks to enlighten our darkness. As the noisy dinner guests argue their way through post-September 11th hysteria, every position seems to have a point. Caught in a pinball machine of educated debate, we ricochet between arguments with a velocity that ends, finally, at full tilt. (10/6/03) (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave. 212-239-6200.)



ZOHAR LAZAR

SITI Company's "bobrauschenbergamerica," at BAM's Next Wave Festival.

PLAYING BURTON
The Richard Burton look-alike Brian Mallon gives a sympathetic portrayal of the romantic Welsh actor who overcame his hardscrabble background to win renown on stage and screen and to woo Elizabeth Taylor, but died at fifty-eight, his career dissolved by drink, marital troubles, and tax difficulties. Written and directed by one of his countrymen, Mark Jenkins. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-868-4444.)

THE RIVALS
In a delightful production at the Pearl, Sheridan's Restoration comedy gets an extra boost not only from tightly laced corsets but from skilled performances by older actors, notably Robert Hock as the imperious father Sir Anthony Absolute. Directed by Robert Neff Williams. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

A ROOSTER IN THE HENHOUSE
A lighthearted, lightweight romp through the ups and downs in the life of a stay-at-home dad, written and performed by John O'Hern. The show doesn't pretend to address any of the issues surrounding the trend of men staying home with their kids or of stay-at-home parents in general. But it works fine as a fondly told series of riffs that take the audience from conception to kindergarten. Directed by Mark S. Graham. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Closes Oct. 25.)

ROUNDING THIRD
Don (Robert Clohessy) and Michael (Matthew Arkin) are the odd couple of Little League baseball coaching. Don, in jeans and sneakers, seeks to win at all costs; Michael, in khakis and wing tips, seeks only to share a "special activity with his son." Both men have their own inner agendas: when Don barks at the kids about not making mental errors, it's clear that he regrets having made plenty of his own, and when Michael coddles the kids, encouraging them to be "the captains of their own little ships," it's easy to see that he himself could use a little nurturing. John Rando's unforced direction lets the play's real concerns emerge subtly: not baseball, but manhood and fatherhood. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

SMASHING
In a dark comedy by Brooke Berman, a young woman who discovers that a bitter ex-lover has written a lacerating best-seller about her seeks revenge. Directed by Trip Cullman. (Intar 53, 508 W. 53rd St. 212-868-4444.)

THE THING ABOUT MEN
Doris Dörrie's ruefully resigned comedy of modern immorality, "Men," has become an uproarious musical—with exuberant songs about workaholism, betrayal, and compromise, performed by a cast with nimble comic timing. When the cheating ad man Tom (Marc Kudisch, who nails the "lovable jerk"

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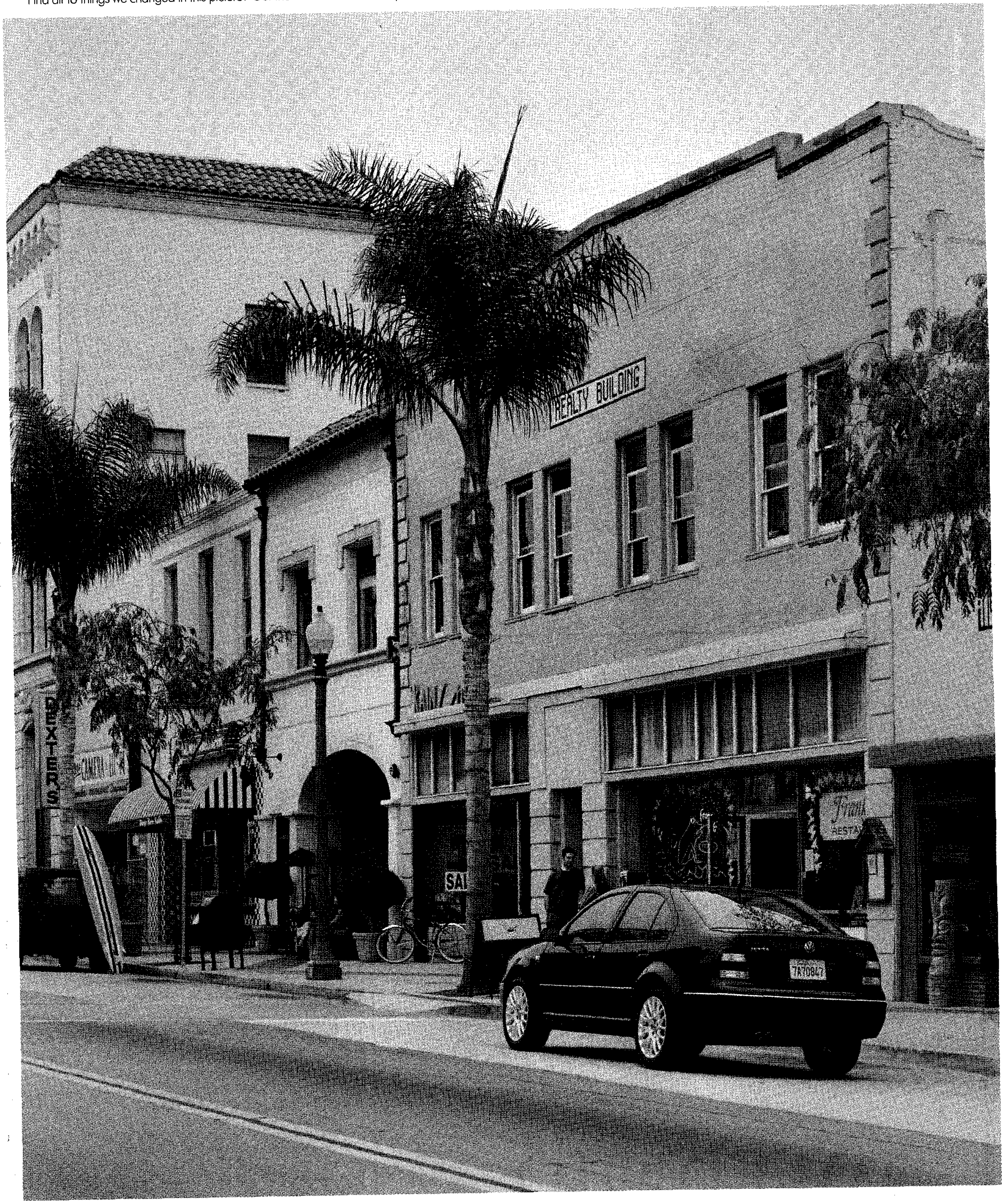
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character and also has a great baritone) finds out that his wife (Leah Hocking) is having an affair, he hunts down her lover, Sebastian (the dreamy tenor Ron Bohmer), and moves in with him incognito. With music by Jimmy Roberts and a book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro. Directed by Mark Clements. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.)

TO MY CHAGRIN
Peggy Shaw, the Obie-winning actress and self-described "second-generation, inbred Irish, white, butch grandmother," confronts her complicated relationship with her mixed-race grandson in a new one-woman play at P.S. 122. Directed by Lois Weaver. (150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-477-5288. Closes Oct. 26.)

TOUCH
In a play by Toni Press-Coffman, Tom Everett Scott plays an astronomer recovering from his wife's murder. Directed by Loretta Greco. (The Women's Project, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200. Closes Oct. 26.)

TRUMBO
In 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee accused Dalton Trumbo—the screenwriter for such movies as "Spartacus" and "Roman Holiday"—of Communist leanings, and during the next thirteen years he was banned from working in his chosen field. In his son Christopher Trumbo's moving and evocative stage portrait of him, based on letters Trumbo wrote to his family, friends, and enemies, Brian Dennehy stars as Trumbo, reading out his letters, and Gordon MacDonald plays Christopher, providing the narration that binds them together. Directed by Peter Askin. (9/15/03) (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

WAITING FOR GODOT
Beckett's play reëmerges, on its fiftieth anniversary, in a production by the Tangent Theatre Company. Directed by Keith Teller. (Center Stage, 48 W. 21st St. 212-946-5008.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

BOOBS! THE MUSICAL
Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-239-6200.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Nov. 2.)

CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 212-239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

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Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

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Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

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Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

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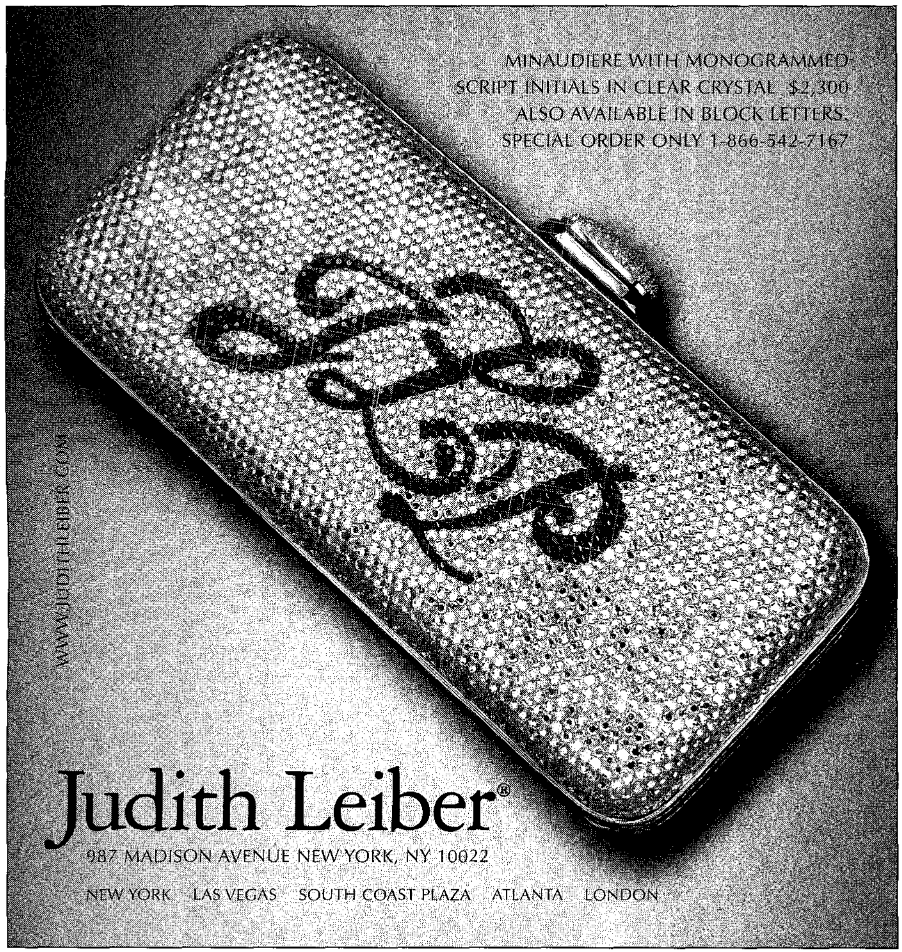
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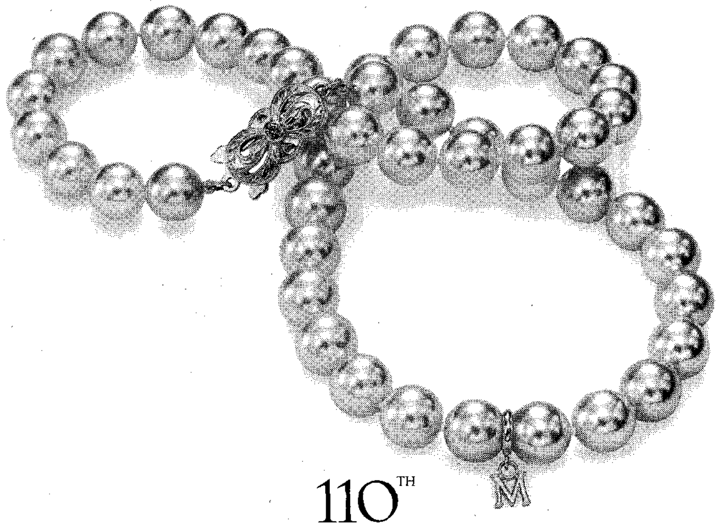

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St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.
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Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.
TAKE ME OUT
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.
THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.
URINETOWN
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

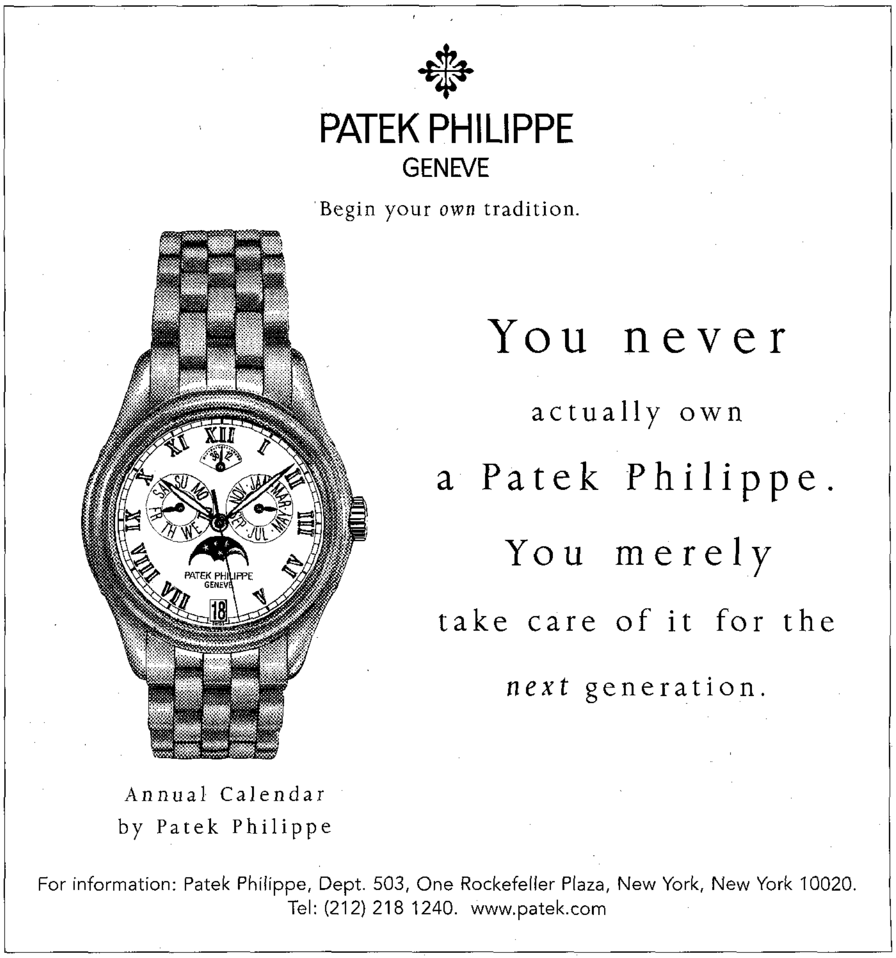
DANCE

"KAASH"
The five young dancers of London's Akram Khan Company create a dance of synchronized, scything movement—a clockwork of organic, human-machine motion. As a backdrop of glowing color shifts behind them and an urgent drum-and-techno score heightens the tension, the audience waits in suspense to see what new feat of controlled flexibility the dancers will come up with next. Eulalia Ayguade is astonishing; she rises to her toes in fluid arcing movements, sinks nearly to the floor to form a diamond-sharp plane, and then rises again. "Kaash" means "if only" in Hindi—a nod to Khan's South Asian roots—and the completed thought might read: if only we could all move like this. (The Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 15-18 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 2 and 7:30.)

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
In his half-century-anniversary season at BAM, Cunningham proves that he's still challenging conventions. In "Fluid Canvas," a New York première, a backdrop of digitally manipulated hand movements becomes part of the dance, and chance is introduced as the composer John King reconfigures the score each night. Chance also plays a role in the world première "Split Sides," determining the order of two combinations of décor and music. That music, by the bands Sigur Rós and Radiohead, is, as usual, separately conceived and independent, but, unlike most of the music Cunningham uses, it has a beat, which should interestingly punctuate the choreographer's fluid rhythms. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 16-18 at 7:30.)

RONALD K. BROWN/EVIDENCE
In his season at the Joyce, the dancer and his company display his distinctive spiritual and athletic choreography in a program of new and recent work, including the première "Come Ye," a tribute to the late Nina Simone; "For You," set to music by Donny Hathaway; and two repertory pieces: "Walking Out the Dark" (2002), set to original music by Philip Hamilton, and "High Life" (2000), with music by Oscar J. Brown, Jr., the JBs, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, and Wunmi Olaiya. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 21 at 8. Through Oct. 26.)

BALLET NACIONAL DE CUBA
The fifty-five-year-old company, under the direction of Alicia Alonso, returns to New York, performing two programs, a traditional production of "Don Quixote" that rustles with lace mantillas and matadors' red silken scarves, and an eclectic evening of repertory works. The mixed program includes the ballet of Lorca's "Blood Wedding," performed by men in boots and women in sombre ruffles against a stark rural backdrop, to the plangent sounds of Spanish guitar; "Canto Vital," a piece by four strapping Greg Louganis look-alikes in bright swimsuits; the "Black Swan" dance from "Swan Lake"; and Alonso's dreamy "Les Sylphides," based on Fokine's ethereal neo-Romantic vision, in which the long white tulle skirts of the lovely ballerinas lend a nostalgic quality to their gliding. ♦ Oct. 15 and Oct. 18 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 3: "Don Quixote." ♦ Oct. 16-17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 2: "Les Sylphides,"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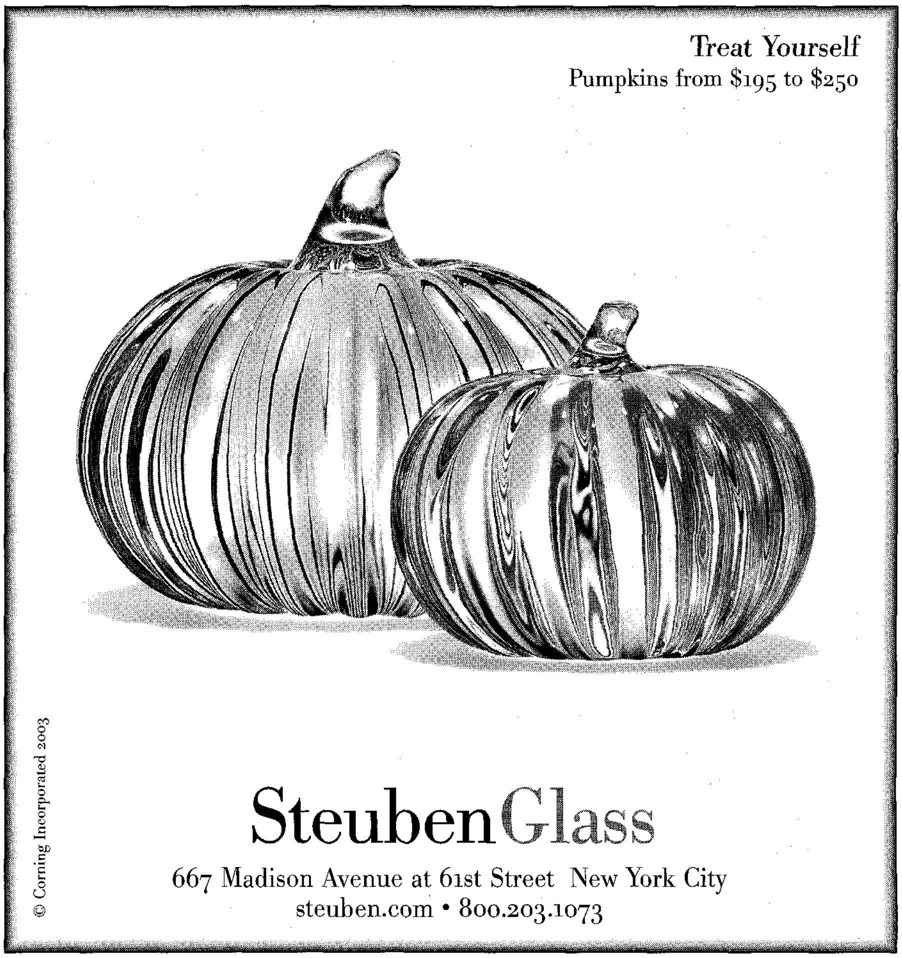
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"Black Swan," "Canto Vital," and "Blood Wedding." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-764-7900.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE

In "Lawn," a commentary on human interaction with the environment, O'Connor's five dancers use dramatic facial expressions and sharp hand gestures to tell a tale about craven human attitudes toward nature. Using a rich language of movement, they string symbols together like poetry, writing a rebus in motion. With an eclectic, filmic score by James Baker and a video montage by Ben Speth of cautionary images of urban decay, cultivation, and embattled wilderness. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 15-18 at 7.)

DANSPACE PROJECT

The fall 2003 "DraftWork" series opens with "Three New Works," a suite of works in progress by the choreographer Brendan McCall, which combine movement, video, and sound. A discussion with the artist follows. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 18 at 3.)

"DESCENT"

Noémie Lafrance's dizzying, spectral site-specific 2002 dance, choreographed along several flights of a spiral staircase in the Clocktower building, in Tribeca, returns for five weeks of performances. The audience enters at the twelfth floor, then gradually descends the stairs as dancers appear on landings above and below. (108 Leonard St. 212-868-4444. Oct. 16 and Oct. 19 at 7 and 8:30 and Oct. 17-18 at 7, 8:30, and 10. Through Nov. 23.)

"REND AND SEW"

Dixon Place presents a new work by Clare Byrne Dance that is, in part, an exercise in point of view. Set in the University Settlement's nineteenth-century gymnasium, the dance divides audience members between the balcony and the court, then makes them switch places, and perspectives, at intermission. The seating arrangement isn't the only thing that shifts; Byrne alternates mournful sections set to spirituals and Fauré's "Requiem" with jubilant segments set to Dixieland jazz and gospel, pushing her dancers through grief toward rapture. The company sputters a bit when Byrne turns the flame low, but the fun they have at high heat is joyful and infectious. (184 Eldridge St. 212-219-0736, ext. 112. Oct. 16-18 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 7.)

"IMITATIONS OF DROWNING"

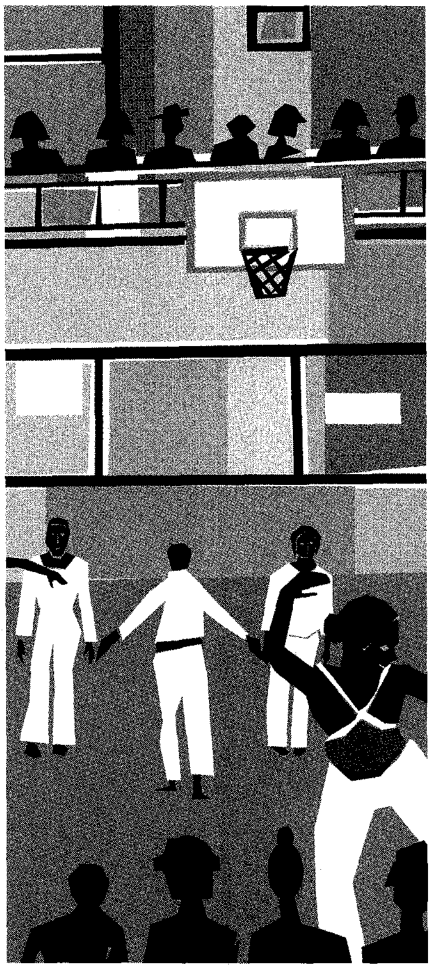
In an ensemble piece that wordlessly illustrates Lady Macbeth's warped psyche, the choreographer Heather Harrington produces an elegant, spine-tingling chill in the hallowed confines of St. Mark's Church. As the queen, Harrington stretches her long hair out with her fingers as she twists above a large pool of blood-red velvet. Three witches slither toward her along the floor, their pointed feet slicing like daggers, their hands contorting in ominous gestures. Accompanied by the piercing strains, hums, and stately Elizabethan processionals of Quentin Chiappetta's score, played live by the Ellison String Quartet, the eight dancers move through the aisles, along the balcony, and among human-size geometric shapes from which light glows eerily. With expressive costumes by Patti Gilstrap. (Dancespace at St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 16-19 at 8:30.)

URBAN BALLET THEATRE

Daniel Catanach's downtown company grew out of outreach programs the choreographer initiated a little over a decade ago. Even when his mix of ballet and urban dance forms doesn't quite click, the dancers—mostly taught by Catanach—exhibit the solid training and love of dance he's given them. This season, in addition to the world première of "Disillusioned," which features a solo by the Catanach alum Danny Tidwell (now with American Ballet Theatre), the group presents last year's "Trouble," a menacing work performed by veiled women, and "El Hambre" ("Hunger," from 1996), a tortured duet involving a man, a woman, and an armchair, performed by guest stars from New York City Ballet, Carla Korbes and Amar Ramasar—the latter yet another Catanach student who's made good. (Harry De Jur Playhouse, Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. Oct. 16-17 at 8 and Oct. 18 at 3 and 8.)

WOMAN'S SONG: THE STORY OF RORO MENDUT

In a co-presentation with World Music Institute, the choreographer and one-woman wonder Lisa Karrer creates a vividly staged multimedia retelling of a popular seventeenth-century Javanese folktale. Joined by shadow puppets devised by Kate Yourke and dancer-actors wearing batiked and gold-splashed Indonesian costumes, Karrer (often on stilts) sings narrative poems by Walt Whitman and Sitor Situmorang, accompanied by the local percussion orchestra Gamelan Son of Lion, which plays compositions by Karrer written in traditional Balinese and Javanese styles. As Karrer feints with martial artists and grapples with the diminutive Balinese dancer Ayu Armini, a video-animated text by Jenny Lynn McNutt flutters across multiple screens, further broadening the story. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 15-16 and Oct. 18 at 8 and Oct. 17 at noon and 8.)



"Rend and Sew," by Clare Byrne Dance, at the University Settlement.

2003 D.U.M.B.O. DANCE FESTIVAL

As part of the seventh annual D.U.M.B.O. Art Under the Bridge Festival, a broad selection of choreographers and dance companies present a weekend of contemporary dance both indoors, at a space on the Brooklyn waterfront, and outdoors, in the Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park. (White Wave, 25 Jay St. For complete festival schedule, call 718-855-8822 or see www.whitewavedance.com. Oct. 17-19.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

GOOD CHARLOTTE

These god-fearing tykes wrap themselves in the trappings of punk rock, but they play a diluted and fangless simulacrum that would bring tears to Johnny Thunders' eyes. Despite this deficiency, the kids' knack for big hooks and harmonies has made them "T.R.L." stars. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 14-16 at 6:45.)

"SINATRA: HIS VOICE. HIS WORLD. HIS WAY."

Ol' Blue Eyes is back at Radio City Music Hall, thanks to a forty-piece orchestra, the Rockettes, and never-before-seen concert footage. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Oct. 14 at 8, Oct. 15 at 2 and 8, Oct. 16 at 8, Oct. 17 at 2 and 8, Oct. 18 at 2, 5, and 8, and Oct. 19 at 2 and 7.)

INTERPOL

Following a world tour supporting their début album, "Turn on the Bright Lights," the fetchingly dressed local boys made good bring their chilly post-punk paeans home. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 15 at 6. ♦ Roseland. Oct. 21 at 7:30.)

SIMPLY RED

Though only modestly popular here (most remembered for the soulful 1986 hit "Holding Back the Years"), the Brit-soul stalwarts, led by the redheaded Mick Hucknall, are icons abroad. Eight albums later, Simply Red returns with a new one, "Home," and hopes of reviving its long-dormant Stateside career. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-307-7171. Oct. 16 at 8.)

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"

The Lincoln Center series gets under way on Oct. 16 with **Billy Porter.** After winning the "Star Search" male-vocalist crown eleven years ago, this Pittsburgh native went on to appear on Broadway (his credits include "Miss Saigon," "Grease," and "Five Guys Named Moe"), in Hollywood ("The Broken Hearts Club"), and in living rooms across America (the soap opera "Another World"). He puts his varied talents to work on a program of show tunes and soul numbers. Oct. 17: The magnetic "42nd Street" veteran **Christine Ebersole.** Oct. 18: The pianist and vocalist **Eric Comstock.** (Kaplan Penthouse, 165 W. 65th St., tenth floor. 212-721-6500. All shows at 8 and 10.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Oct. 16 at 8: The Moroccan-born Israeli cantor **Emil Zrihan** is known as "the voice of the mocking bird," thanks to his powerful countertenor. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Oct. 17 at 8: The Shona people of Zimbabwe consider the shell-encrusted thumb piano known as the *mbira* to be "a telephone to the spirits." Traditionally, dialling deceased ancestors takes all night, but **Forward Kwenda,** a young self-taught master of the instrument, and **Erica Azim,** a Californian who picked up the *mbira* after first hearing it as a teen-ager more than three decades ago, offer a somewhat shorter sampling of the deeply relaxing music. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space.) Oct. 18 at 8: A tribute to the legendary fado singer Amalia Rodrigues, featuring **Argentina Santos,** the septuagenarian "grand lady of fado," the singer and guitarist **Jorge Fernando,** and other key members of Portugal's fado scene. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St.) (For more information about all shows, call 212-545-7536.)

TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI AND HER JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Keeping a jazz big band active over the past thirty years may be as close to a Herculean task as any musician could face. The pianist, composer, arranger, and bandleader Toshiko Akiyoshi has not only sustained an orchestra all this time but also—along with saxophonist **Lew Tabakin,** the band's co-leader and chief soloist and Akiyoshi's husband—built it into one of the great ensembles in jazz history. But now Akiyoshi, who is in her early seventies, is calling it quits to concentrate on her own piano work. The band will go out in style at Carnegie Hall, presenting a program of signature numbers. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 17 at 8.)

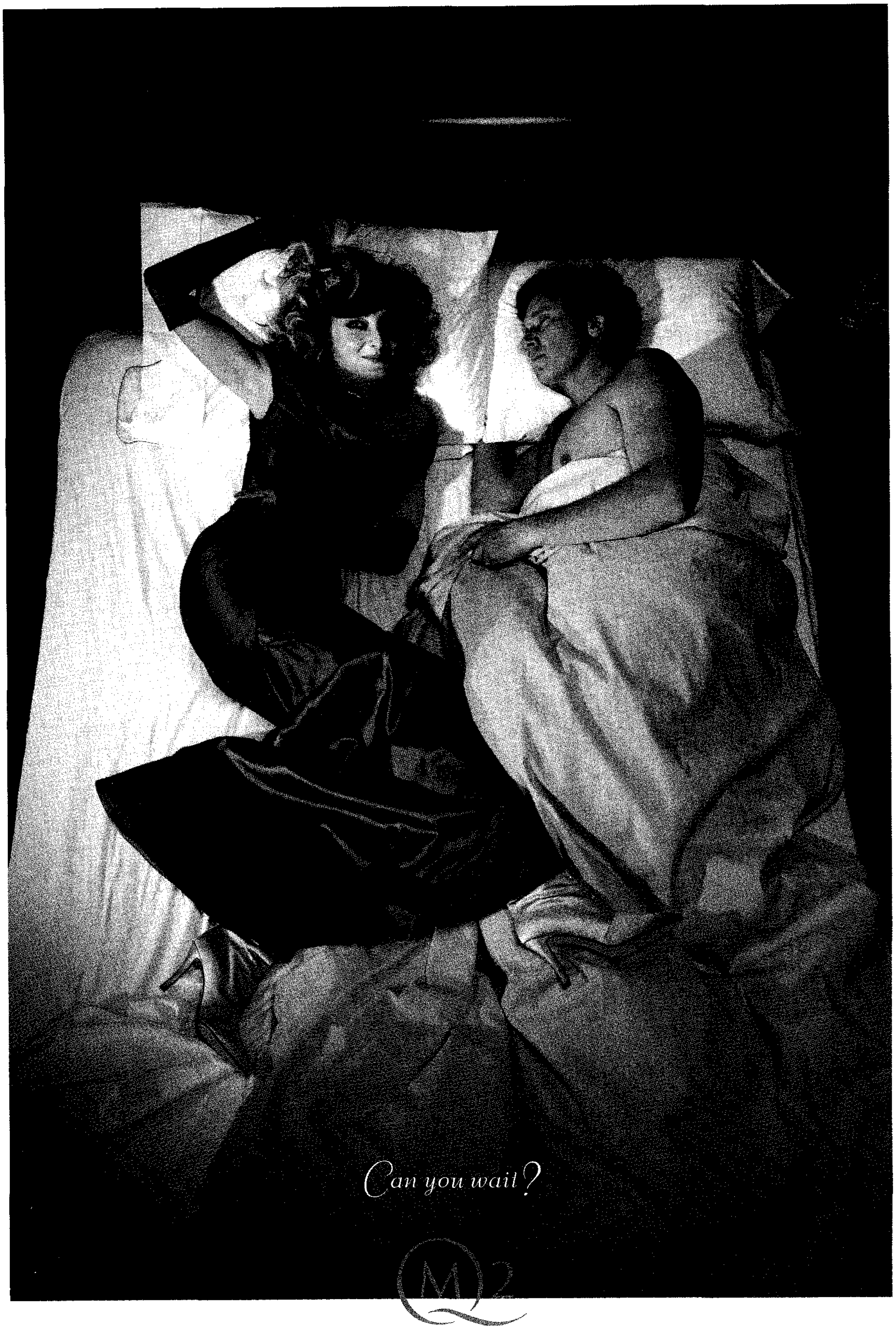
JERRY GONZÁLEZ AND THE FORT APACHE BAND

Long before Latin music attained its current clout, the trumpeter and *conguero* Jerry González and the Fort Apache Band were mixing jazz and authentic Latin rhythms into a steaming brew that left plenty of room for heated Coltrane-style improvisations and percussive fervor. (Aaron Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 135th St. 212-650-7100. Oct. 18 at 8.)

LIL MALCOLM AND THE HOUSE ROCKERS

Top-shelf zydeco music from southwestern Louisiana. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. Oct. 19 at 7:30.)

KIM DEMARCO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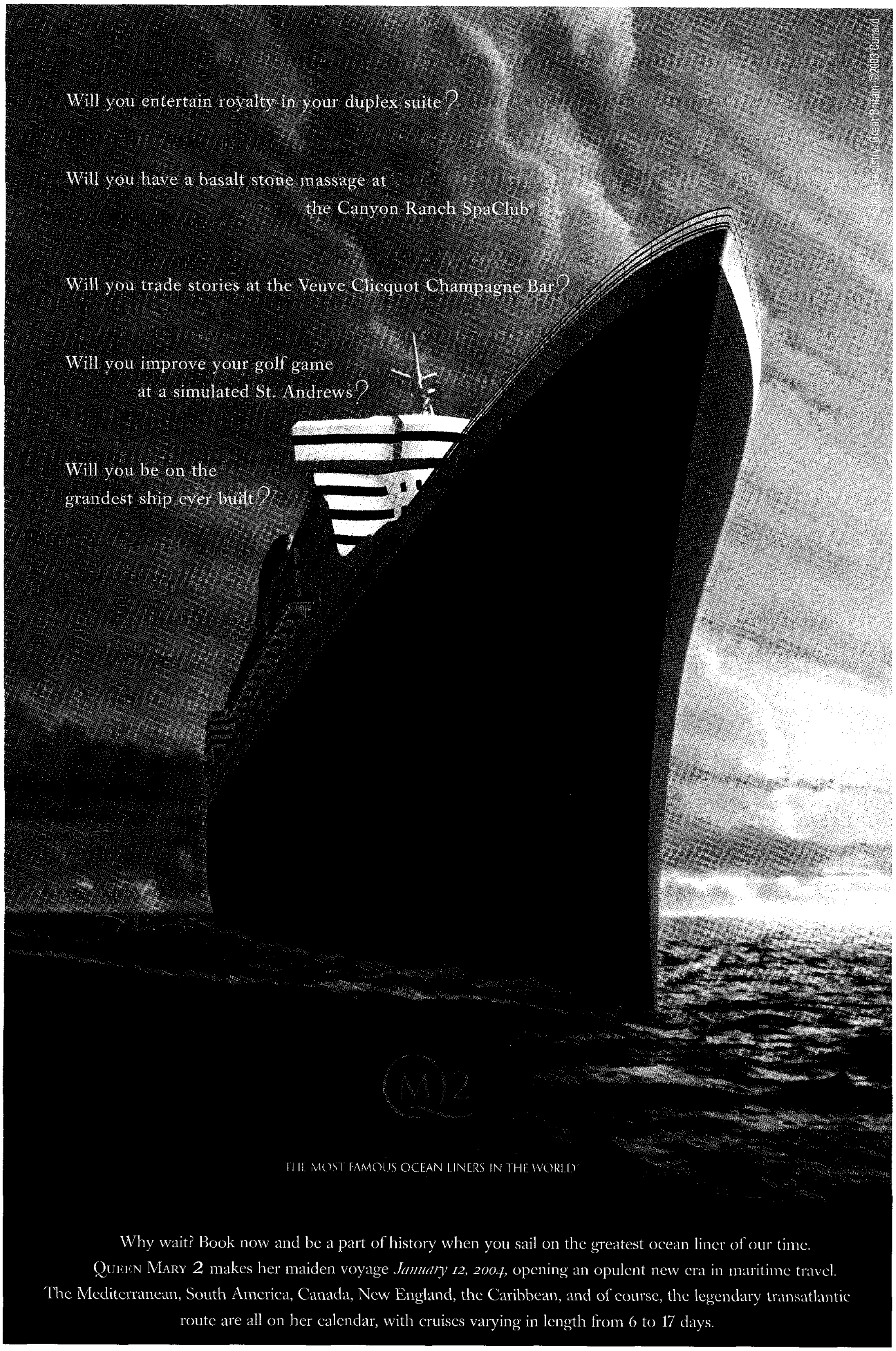

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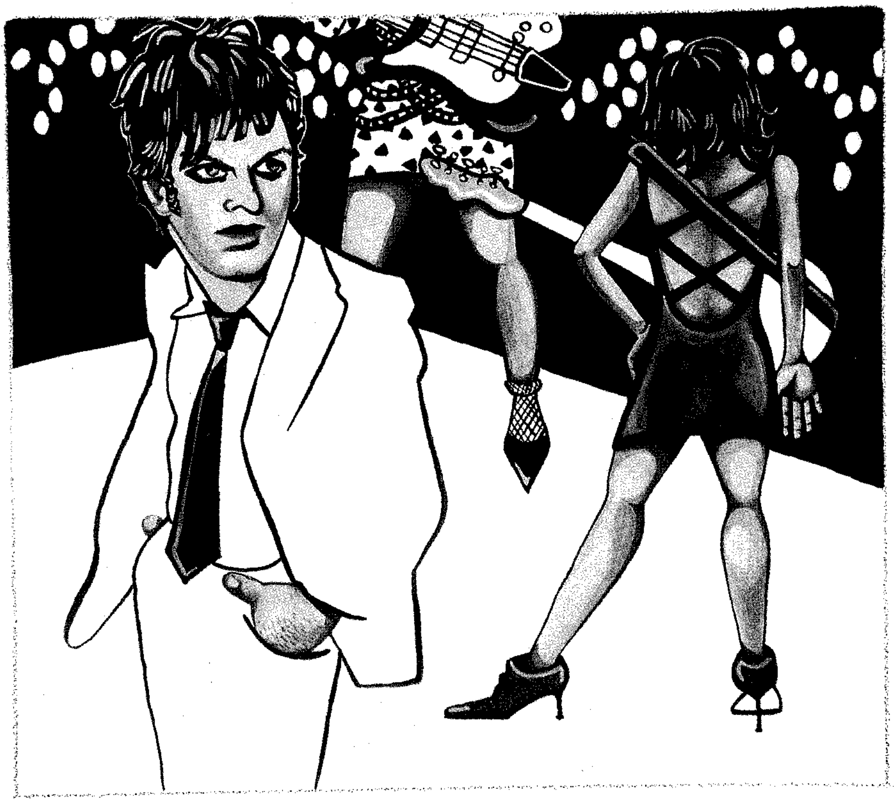


Jesse Hartman brings his all-girl band Laptop to Pianos on Oct. 15.

LEAH TINARI

BROADWAY INSPIRATIONAL VOICES
The vocalist Patti LaBelle and the television personality Star Jones join the gospel ensemble made up of actors from the Great White Way. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Oct. 19 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 17: After fronting the industrial agitprop ensemble the Beatnigs and the politicized hip-hop duo Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy, the San Franciscan Michael Franti went on to explore more soulful, though no less socially conscious, territory with his band **Spearhead.** He recently laid down his funk and hip-hop tools for the solo acoustic album "Songs from the Front Porch," but now Franti and Spearhead are back in full effect with the new release "Everyone Deserves Music." With **Lifesavas.** Oct. 19: The **Cannabis Cup Reggae Band** celebrates Peter Tosh's birthday.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 16: The California sextet **Beulah** is known for sunny pop complete with horn sections and string arrangements, but its new album, "Yoko," heads in a darker and more rewarding direction.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 17-18: Randy Cordeiro, a Bay Area singer who goes by the name Surreal Neil, leads **Superdiamond,** a decade-old, surprisingly popular sextet that pays tribute to the pop icon Neil Diamond. Oct. 20: The **Gotan Project.** "Gotan" is "tango" scrambled, and that is a perfect description of the music of this French d.j. ensemble, which fuses Argentinean sounds with electronica. Oct. 21: Pennsylvania's **Fuel** specializes in histrionic guitar rock, with a side of grunge-era melodrama.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 15: The poet, playwright, novelist, and singer **Carl Hancock Rux.** Oct. 17-18: **Garland Jeffreys & the Coney Island Playboys** go wild in the streets.

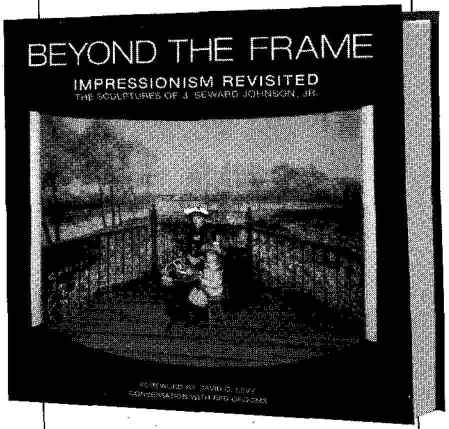
NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Oct. 17: **Beulah** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Oct. 21: Despite their maudlin name, **Pretty Girls Make Graves** aren't black-clad, clove-smoking miserablists. They're a rather energetic outfit that owes more to the punky, angular, fragmented sonic attack of Fugazi than to the Smiths song from which they cribbed their name (the Smiths didn't write the line either; they took it from Jack Kerouac's "Dharma Bums").

PIANOS
158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—Oct. 15: The band **Laptop** belongs to Jesse Hartman, a Long Island native turned downtown musician with a hundred-and-twenty-gigabyte sense of humor. As a teen-ager he played guitar for the punk legend Richard Hell, and as an adult he favors eighties-derived synth pop that calls to mind Robert Palmer and a roomful of laughing gas.

SATALLA
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Oct. 16: The Cuban *charanga* violinist **Alfredo de la Fé.**

SIN-É
150 Attorney St. (212-388-0077)—Oct. 18-19: A pair of parties to raise money for the third issue of *Yeti*, an underground art-and-rock magazine published with a great deal of passion by Mike McGonigal, a Seattle-based music journalist and longtime zinester (in the eighties he produced *Chemical Imbalance*, which published material by David Sedaris, Chris Ware, and Lester Bangs). The first night features **Kurt Ralske,** formerly of Ultra Vivid Scene, the writer **Sam Lipsyte,** the Holy Modal Rounders vet **Peter Stampfel,** Luna's **Dean & Britta,** and the **Mad Scene,** which is led by Hamish Kilgour of the woefully under-recognized New Zealand rock group the Clean. The following evening, the stage belongs to **Mark Dwinell,** late of Boston's improvisational rock band Bright, and Brooklyn's neo-folkie outfit **Timesbold,** among others.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Oct. 21: A showcase for the West Coast hip-hop label Stones Throw, whose founder **Peanut Butter Wolf** signs both artists and d.j.s. His marquee musician is Otis Jackson, Jr., a d.j. and rapper who goes by many names to suit his wildly divergent and numerous recording projects. Here he'll be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Madlib, the d.j. trusted not only by prominent underground rappers but by Blue Note Records, the eminent jazz label that recently enlisted him to remix and reinterpret its fabled catalogue for the album "Shades of Blue: Madlib Invades Blue Note." Dining.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope (718-230-0236)—Oct. 16: The beloved U.K. space-pop combo **Broadcast.**

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Oct. 16: **Louque,** an earthy singer-songwriter from Louisiana, and **20 Miles,** the surprisingly melodic back-porch rock group led by Judah Bauer, the guitarist for the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion.

"U.S. 93, Wikieup, Arizona," taken in 1976 by Stephen Shore, at 303 Gallery (see Photography).

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Oct. 17: After leaving the seminal country-punk trio Uncle Tupelo some seven years ago and spending time kicking around with his group Son Volt, the singer and guitarist **Jay Farrar** has since spun himself a small solo career. The alt-country veteran gets down and dirty—in a lonesome and acoustic way—on his latest release, "Terroir Blues."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 16-18: Dip into the recorded oeuvre of **Aaron Neville** from his five-decade career and it becomes pretty clear that this mountain of a man with the unearthly falsetto can sing just about anything. "Nature Boy," his first all-standards album, is as lovely as expected, and to spotlight the achievement Neville brings in some heavy-duty jazz players to support him at this rare club date. For a few nights, at least, his estimable brothers will not be missed. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 16-19: An indomitable singer whose gifts are never so clear as on her own ingeniously crafted songs, **Abbey Lincoln** shows no signs of taking the easy road into legendhood. Her shows can be staggering in their intensity and invigorating in their affirmation of life and art.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (212-228-6300)—Oct. 17: Smart, sexy, and so in control of an audience that resistance to her icy charms is next to impossible, **Ute Lemper** displays the kind of vocal strength and interpretive imagination that just aren't found in the vast majority of cabaret artists.

CAJUN
129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (212-691-6174)—Mondays and Thursdays: **Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks.** Manning the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, Giordano leads a tuxedo-clad twelve-piece band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. Sundays: Michael Arenella's **Cantonement,** featuring the vocals of Bliss Blood. The rest of the week, combos fluent in Dixieland jazz and other improvisational sounds of New Orleans take the stage. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wrap-around murals, and, starting Oct. 14, **Bobby Short.**

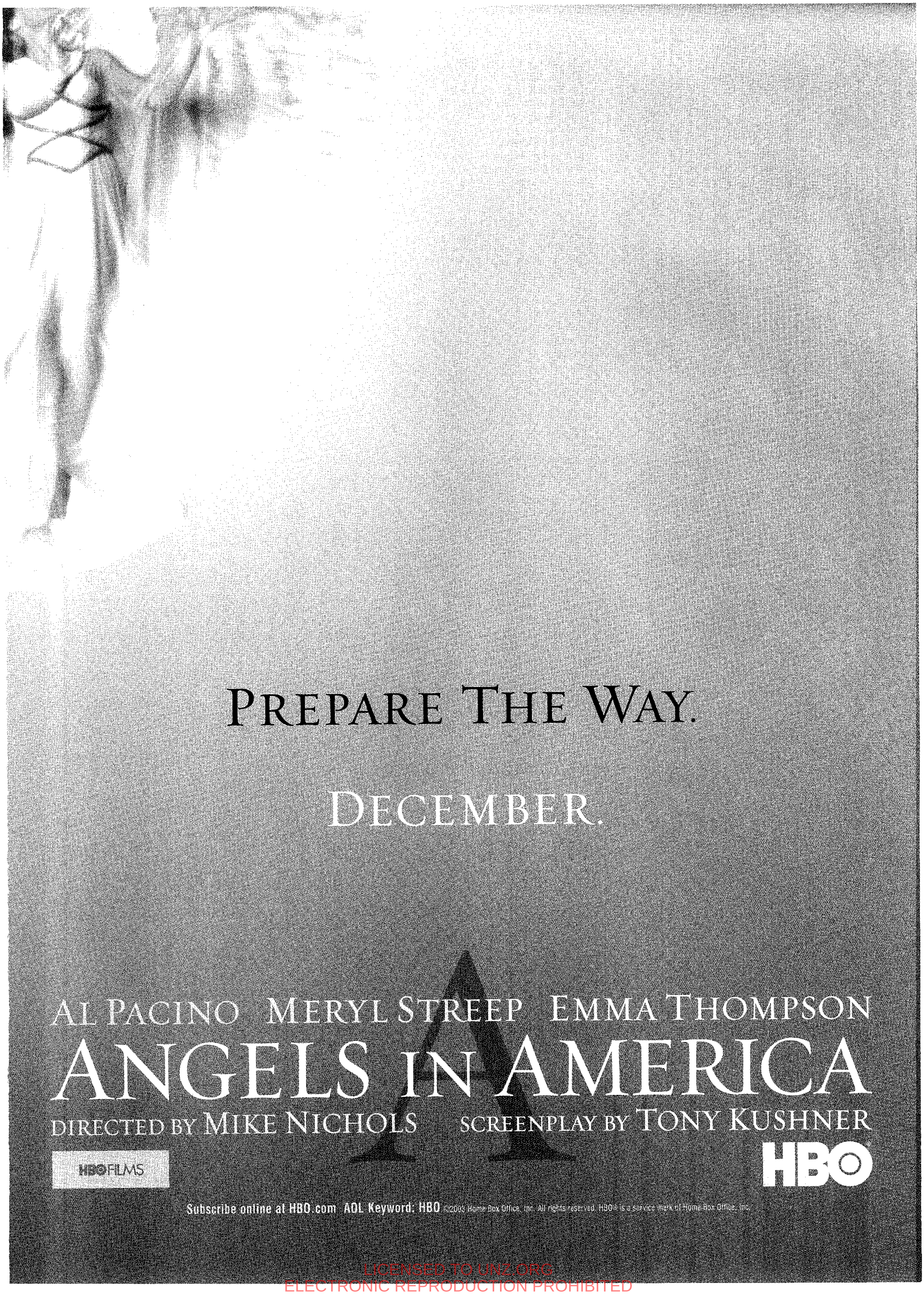
DANNY'S
346 W. 46th St. (212-265-8133)—Oct. 18: **Blossom Dearie** returns to her Sunday-night slot here after a summer off. With her porcelain voice and huge interpretive skills, this treasured veteran knows her way around standards both shopworn and contemporary, enlivening everything she touches with just the right blend of pathos, wit, and stiletto-sharp swing.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Oct. 18: Until they build a pop hall of fame, the songwriter **Jimmy Webb** will continue to be odd man out; his great work too delicate for the rock era, too contemporary to fit snugly in the Great American Songbook. Nonetheless, the vocalist **Michael Feinstein** knows a great song when he hears it. The composer himself joins him as they work through Webb gems found on Feinstein's new album, "Only One Life."

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Oct. 19: There was a time when the trumpeter **Nicholas Payton** was the best friend neo-conservative jazz could have. Those days are over. His new album, "Sonic Trance," and the band of the same name give notice that this prodigious brassman has his ear cocked to hip-hop and the more populist work of Miles Davis. Sudden left turns are always risky, but Payton is too young, and too talented, not to give it a shot. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 17-19: **James (Blood) Ulmer** resisted playing the blues outright for years, but now he has given himself over to a music that permeated his own work from Day One anyway. This still sui-generis guitarist and singer is joined by Living Colour's **Vernon Reid,** the man behind Ulmer's last two blues albums and not a bad six-stringer himself. Dining.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Oct. 20: He hardly ever makes it to our parts these days, and his recordings are few and far between as well, but anyone with a decent memory or album collection knows that **Miroslav Vitous** is one of the bass heavyweights of our time. Although his new "Universal Syncopations" (his first release in eleven years) is an all-star affair, Vitous goes it alone here; a daunting task for oth-



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ers, but not for this gifted and daring virtuoso. Oct. 21: The lyrical swing of the short-lived cornettist Bix Beiderbeck, who died in 1931, continues to cast a spell. On the new album "Private Astronomy," the folk-blues demi-legend **Geoff Muldaur** reveals his affection for Beiderbeck's music, stylishly revamping it with the assistance of such fellow-Bixophiles as the trumpeter **Randy Sandke** and the singer **Martha Wainwright**, who are in Muldaur's ensemble here.

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200, ext. 107)—Oct. 23: Cabaret performances continue at this uptown temple of German art as the vocalist **Daniel Isengart** and the pianist **Bob Goldstone** bring to life the songs of nineteen-twenties Berlin.

STEVE GETZ MUSIC HALL
119 Kent Ave., at N. 7th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-388-3320)—The epicenter of hipness now has its own big-league jazz club. The hundred-person-capacity room inside an Italian restaurant called iO is run by the veteran booking agent Steve Getz, and the premier engagement, on Oct. 17-18, focusses on his father, Stan Getz, the legendary tenor saxophonist. The first night includes three gifted up-and-coming tenor players in a tribute to Getz, as well as an appearance during the late set by a "surprise pianist." The following evening features **Warren Vaché's** Little Big Band.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Oct. 16-17: The saxophonist **Chico Freeman** casts his net wide into the waters of pan-cultural Latin music with his band Guataca, which incorporates Cuban, Spanish, and hip-hop influences.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Oct. 17-18: The bassist **Curtis Lundy** has maintained the bottom line for singers of note, including Betty Carter and Carmen Lundy, his sister; he's here with a solid trio featuring the mainstream piano colossus **John Hicks.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Some wizardly pianists think like, well, pianists. **Eric Reed** (here with his New York Seven band through Oct. 19), on the other hand, has the instincts of a born composer and arranger. His small groups merge horn and rhythm sections orchestrally, placing the leader's gifts as a notable player in context. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—A show of the works of Domenikos Theotokopoulos—El Greco. Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Dreams of Yellow Mountain"** is an extensive show of landscape paintings by Chinese artists who remained loyal to the Ming dynasty after it was overthrown, in 1644, by the Manchus. Their subject was the landscape around the dynasty's symbolic capital, Nanjing; craggy cliffs dotted with pine trees dominate. The occasional figure is provided more for perspective than as subject matter. One exception is a dazzling hand scroll by Shitao, a panoramic epic depicting sixteen Buddhist saints dwelling in the mountains with various auspicious beasts, including a tiger and a dragon. Another work by Shitao, this one a hanging scroll, shows a mountain misted in drops of splattered ink, a technique the artist referred to elsewhere as the "ten thousand ugly ink dots," beating Pollock by a few hundred years. Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"The Responsive Eye"** surveys Native American art from 3000 B.C. forward; the earliest museum endorsements came somewhere in the early nineteen-hundreds, when items began appearing in natural-history and anthropology displays. By the middle of the twentieth century, pieces began making their way into art museums, and collectors like Ralph T. Coe (who was also a curator) took serious interest. Coe amassed the tremendous inventory here, promised to the museum. A surprising amount of it was made for the tourist trade, including a card case, a doll-house chair, and a pair of very pointy little moccasins. Among the pieces that are free of this sort of influence are a pair of headdress frontlets from the Pacific Northwest and several carved masks, including an arrestingly long-beaked ceremonial number whose large, caricatured features look like they could have had some influence on the colonizers—their cartoonists in particular. Through Dec. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

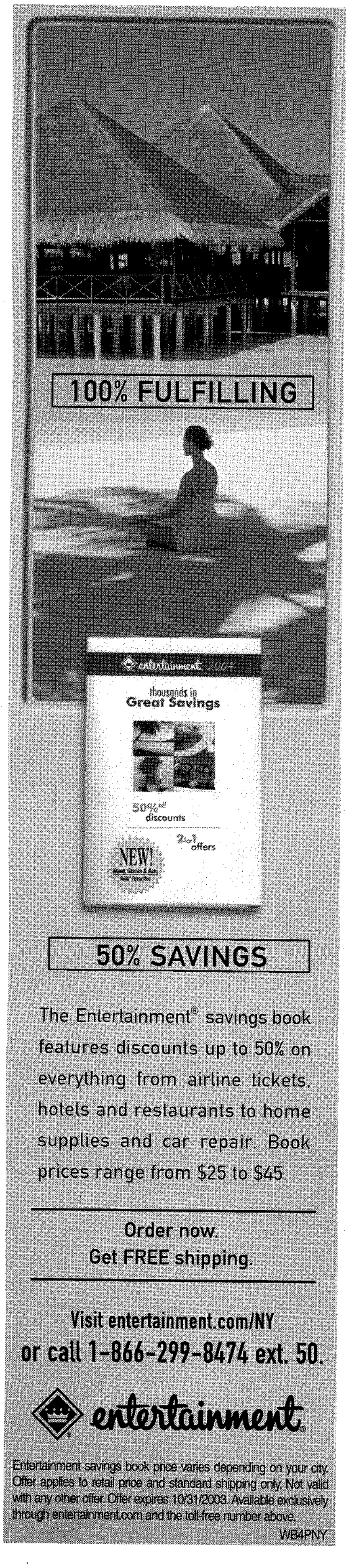
POP NOTES

TWO SIDES OF SOUL
The Atlanta duo Outkast has overdecorated hip-hop for a decade now: to the basic elements of hard beats and stacked rhymes, they have added all manner of brightly colored embellishments—R. & B. melody, dance-club technology, and outer-space mythology. The new Outkast double album, **"Speakerboxxx/The Love Below"** (Arista), is actually two single albums, each masterminded by one of the group's members. Big Boi, the more traditional of the pair, turns in a supremely confident, consistently enjoyable set of enlightened hip-hop, which ranges from the tempo-shifting (and head-spinning) "Ghetto Musick" to the greasy, funky "The Rooster." If Big Boi's music is anchored by the group's traditions, the CD by the flamboyant André 3000 is rudderless, although sometimes brilliantly so; a hip-hop record by association only, it relies heavily on acoustic guitar and warbled falsetto vocals. André's kaleidoscopic first single, "Hey Ya!," is sui generis, a daffy, joyful mix of macho posturing, sweet pop, and novelty dance music ("Shake it like a Polaroid picture!" may be a conceptual instruction, but it's no less ebullient for it). But the rest of the record ranges too far and too wide. The slick, lickerish "Spread," the loose-jointed, almost unhinged "Happy Valentine's Day," and the sultry Norah Jones duet "Take Off Your Cool" are outnumbered by lesser efforts that sound like parodies of old Prince songs.

When Aretha Franklin released "A Rose Is Still a Rose," in 1998, with a title track written by Lauryn Hill and an all-star cast of R. & B. and hip-hop producers, it suggested that the Queen of Soul might still have some currency as an artist. Five years later, **"So Damn Happy"** (Arista) finally picks up where its predecessor left off. The young collaborators are still present (Mary J. Blige co-wrote two songs), but the producers are less worried about fashion or, at the very least, are aware of the recent turn back toward acoustic instruments in soul music; "The Only Thing Missin'" opens the album with a strummed guitar and a light wash of organ that recall Franklin's early-seventies albums as well as contemporary artists like India.Arie. Unfortunately, the subdued production is paired with even more subdued material, pleasant but wan specimens of adult pop that only rarely (as in the two Franklin-penned songs, "You Are My Joy" and the title track) leave a lasting impression.

—*Ben Greenman*

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—Liam Gillick's wall painted with intertwining bands of ochre, brown, and orange transforms the museum's entrance into a cross between a Scandinavian design center and a corporate lobby. The image suggests a magnified diagram of fibre-optic cable, which is fitting, since the project was originally conceived for a Norwegian telecommunications company. Near the ticket counter a painted aluminum cube is suspended from the ceiling, lined with text from B. F. Skinner's "Walden Two." If the connection between the two works seems tangential, that's the point: distraction and diversion are central to Gillick's project, which sneaks his complex and subversive theories of post-utopian social



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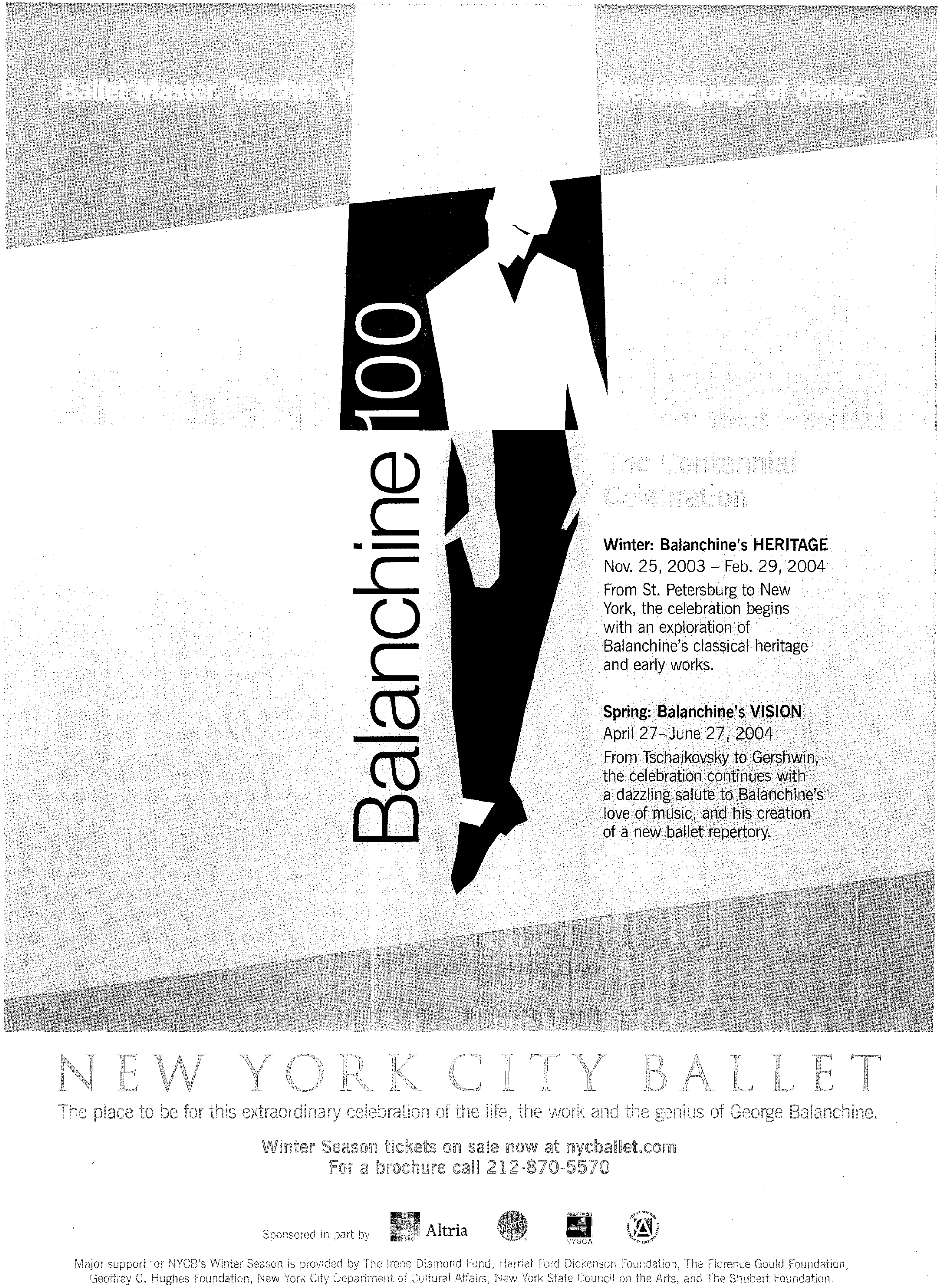

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space (you can find his articulate explanation of this in a museum brochure) into objects that have the polish and appeal of mass-produced design. Through Dec. 1. ♦ As part of an ongoing project, the Taiwanese-born artist Lee Mingwei invites New Yorkers to lead him on a tour of their neighborhood; as of the opening he'd taken six tours, including visits to Coney Island and Harlem. Souvenirs from each journey are displayed in wooden crates, including a flyer for a burlesque beauty contest, a basketball, and a deck of Iraqi Most Wanted playing cards. (The stacks of empty crates near the entrance are the ghosts of future tours.) A split-screen slide show projects photos snapped by both artist and guide, which are accompanied by a soundtrack of their trip. As with most show-and-tells by eager tourists, this one wears thin fast. Through Nov. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—A retrospective of the works of the onetime sign painter James Rosenquist includes major works from the fifties to the present. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—We've seen a lot of him lately, but **"Ellsworth Kelly: Red Green Blue"** is the kind of spare, smart show that can perk up even satiated appetites. Organized by Toby Kamps at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, the exhibition focusses on a group of eight large paintings made between 1958 and 1965. The continuity of color choices (it's the same red, the same green, the same blue every time) puts the focus on simple changes in scale and shape and offers a kind of Rothko Chapel-like immersion in Kelly's elemental hedonism. There are a few rooms of supplementary material—sketches, prints, and a new canvas in the same palette—but at its heart the show really boils down to just two rooms, three colors, and one sleek vibe. Through Nov. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—The Irma & Paul Milstein Family Hall of Ocean Life has reopened. The ninety-four-foot blue-whale model is still suspended from the ceiling, where it has invited generations of schoolchildren to crane their necks and gaze up openmouthed. But now, in the newly renovated digs, the muted cerulean light glimmers on scientifically accurate, repainted pelagic bulk. Meanwhile, on the floor, interactive information consoles, refurbished dioramas, and a mesmerizing film of undersea life tell you all you need to know about red tube worms, dolphins, sharks, coral reefs, and the recently discovered Indonesian coelacanth. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—Baseball produces relics as readily as statistics, and the refreshing art in the American Folk Art Museum's **"The Perfect Game: America Looks at Baseball"** includes penny-arcade sluggers, player portraits embroidered by a game-deprived convict from sock and shoelace threads, several balls decorated with India ink by a multitalented umpire, frieze work from the original Yankee Stadium, a mysterious Mets logo fashioned by a Cuna Indian seamstress in Panama, an enamel-on-tin image of Jackie Robinson stealing home, and photographs of the shining but evanescent Bosox patterns mowed onto the Fenway Park outfield grass by groundskeeper David R. Mellor, a Cézanne of this new genre. Cooperstown, take note. Through Feb. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (212-838-6690)—James McNeill Whistler's career was floundering when he arrived in Venice in 1879, bankrupt, to accept a much needed commission. He was supposed to stay for only three months, but he wound up working there for more than a year, making over fifty prints and about a hundred pastel drawings. Approximately eighty examples by Whistler himself and by those who were influenced by his atmospheric etchings of everyday Venice are on display in **"Whistler and His Circle in Venice."** Sensibly, Whistler stayed away from the Grand Canal and the Piazza San Marco and instead focussed on capturing unsentimental images (artisans around a glass furnace, a fish store). A couple of photographs by Alfred Steiglitz echo Whistler's concerns with both Venice's vertical lines and its laundry. Through Nov. 22. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—When Magdalena Carmen Frieda Kahlo y Calderón was a child in the suburbs of Mexico City, her German Jewish father pulled her out of the convent her Spanish and Indian mother had chosen and sent her to a German school. Years later, when Kahlo learned that her alma mater had begun distributing Nazi-produced genealogical charts and encouraging the *kinder* to document their racial purity, she put her concern into her work, using the same three-generation family tree to document her own mestiza and Sephardic roots. This small, pointed exhibit, **"Frida Kahlo's Intimate Family Picture,"** investigates that image and a few others for covert symbols of her Jewish lineage. Through Jan. 4. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—A compact, satisfying new retrospective, **"George Inness and the Visionary Landscape,"** offers a fresh look at a subtly distinctive American painter (1825-94). At first glance, Inness's paintings are echo chambers: Claude, Friedrich, and the Barbizon painters come to mind in his early works; Whistler, Corot, and Monet obviously had some influence later on. Those landscapes, with their immanent geometry, hushed light, and skittering touch, have a quietly accumulating power, especially if you have a taste for dusk and haze. Inness was an ardent Swedenborgian; he believed that the natural world was "not true except as an appearance," and his best pictures have a kind of willed, opulent insubstantiality. Through Dec. 28. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—The exhaustive and often enchanting **"Russia Engages the World: 1453-1825"** is gorgeously situated: in low-lit, marble-walled rooms, liturgical chants and classical music play softly as illuminated manuscripts, silk imperial scrolls, burnished coins, and decorative engravings gleam. The artifacts of Russia's confrontation with the world testify to its peculiar destiny: to crush Western Europe's armies only to fall victim to Western Europe's ideas. Even after defeating the Swedes, in 1709, Peter the Great raised a glass to his foes and military "teachers," and by 1720, as decreed by the General Regulation on display, Swedes were supervising Russia's nascent bureaucracy. The Russians marched into Paris in 1815 as victors as well, but it was French notions of liberty and justice that convulsed Russia and brought down the monarchy a hundred years later. Through Jan. 31. (Open Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

PIERO MANZONI
The Italian artist, who died in 1963 at the age of twenty-nine, was fond of bad-boy antics like canning his own excrement (sold for the price of its weight in gold). But, as this show demonstrates, he also possessed a stunning formal grace. The white paintings on view—Manzoni called them "achromes"—may be constructed from irreverent materials (fake fur, cotton puffs, polystyrene), but they could go head to head with anything by Malevich or Ryman. Through Nov. 1. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

RICHARD POUSETTE-DART
As a teen-ager, Pousette-Dart (1916-92) had a formative encounter with Picasso's "Girl Before a Mir-

BOOK CURRENTS

In the Spotlight

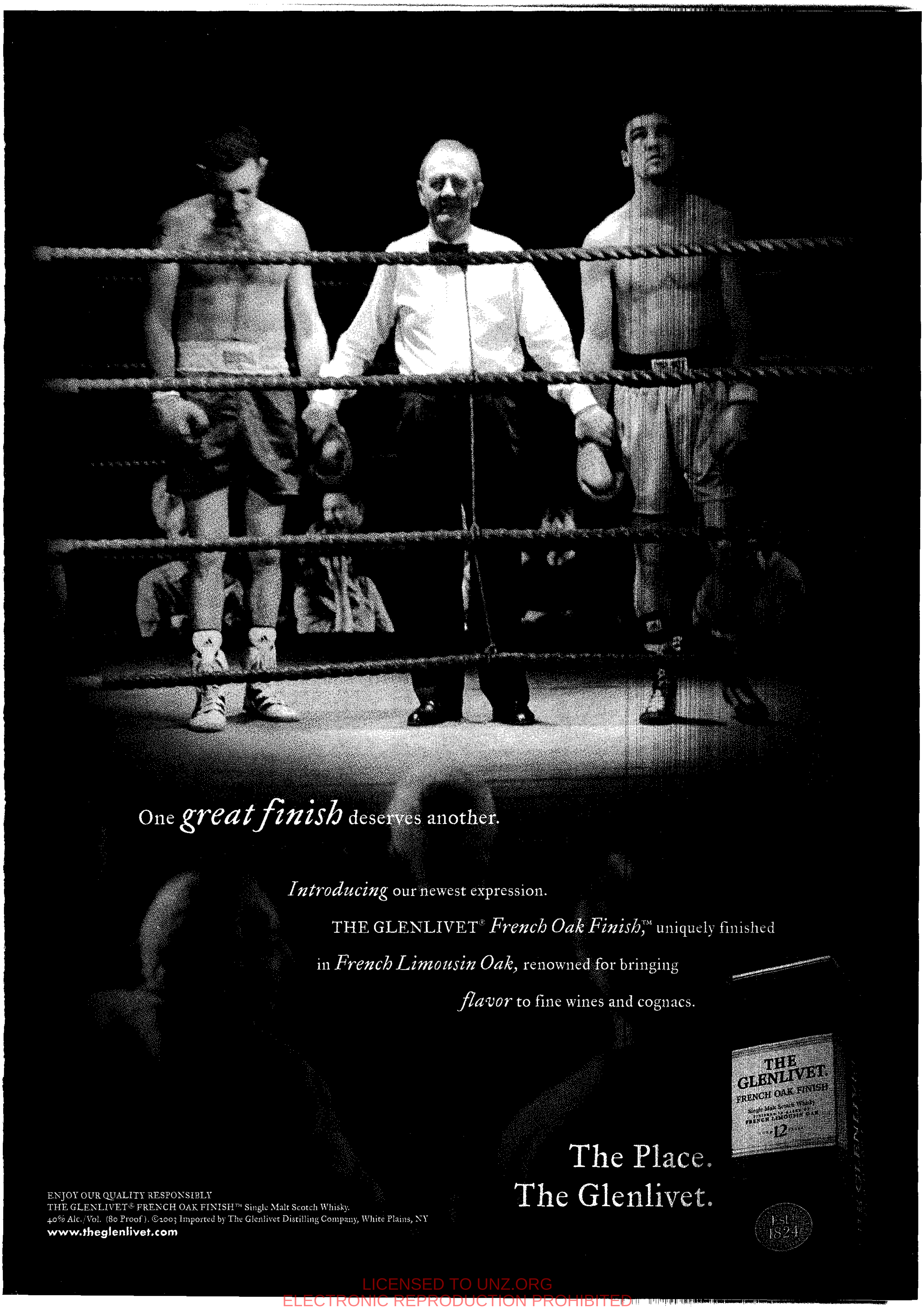
Eleonora Duse, the turn-of-the-century Italian actress who inspired Stanislavsky's Method, told her company that to play Ibsen's characters they had to know unhappiness, and, if necessary, they should go looking for it. In **ELEONORA DUSE: A BIOGRAPHY** (Knopf), Helen Sheehy makes it clear that Duse followed her own advice. Duse was a genius at creating misery for herself; her disastrous affair with the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio must have fed her onstage characterizations of Hedda and Marguerite, just as it gave d'Annunzio material for his novel "Il Fuoco."

TONY MILLIONAIRE

As the premier husband-and-wife acting team of the middle of the twentieth century, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne—the subject of Margot Peters's **DESIGN FOR LIVING** (Knopf)—projected sizzling chemistry onstage. Offstage, their marriage was probably sexless—Alfred was rumored to have been gay—and their domestic arrangements gravitated toward chaste ménages à trois, often with their friend Noël Coward. Did their sexuality, repressed at home, emerge more conspicuously in their performance? One critic wrote that "The Guardsman," a comedy about a couple who lead each other in sex games, was the true story of the Lunts' marriage: "They lived to act for each other."

Bela Lugosi was a sensation as Dracula on Broadway, and the film version made him Hollywood's leading horror star. But, as Arthur Lennig tells us in **THE IMMORTAL COUNT** (University of Kentucky), Lugosi wanted romantic roles and was frustrated that his accent and European mannerisms limited him to playing the heavy. Only in life could he play Don Juan: he married five times and died in 1956 beneath a large nude portrait of Clara Bow, a souvenir of their affair.

—*Kate Taylor*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The book that was excerpted in *The New Yorker* on August 18th

"A VENETIAN AFFAIR is an enchantment!

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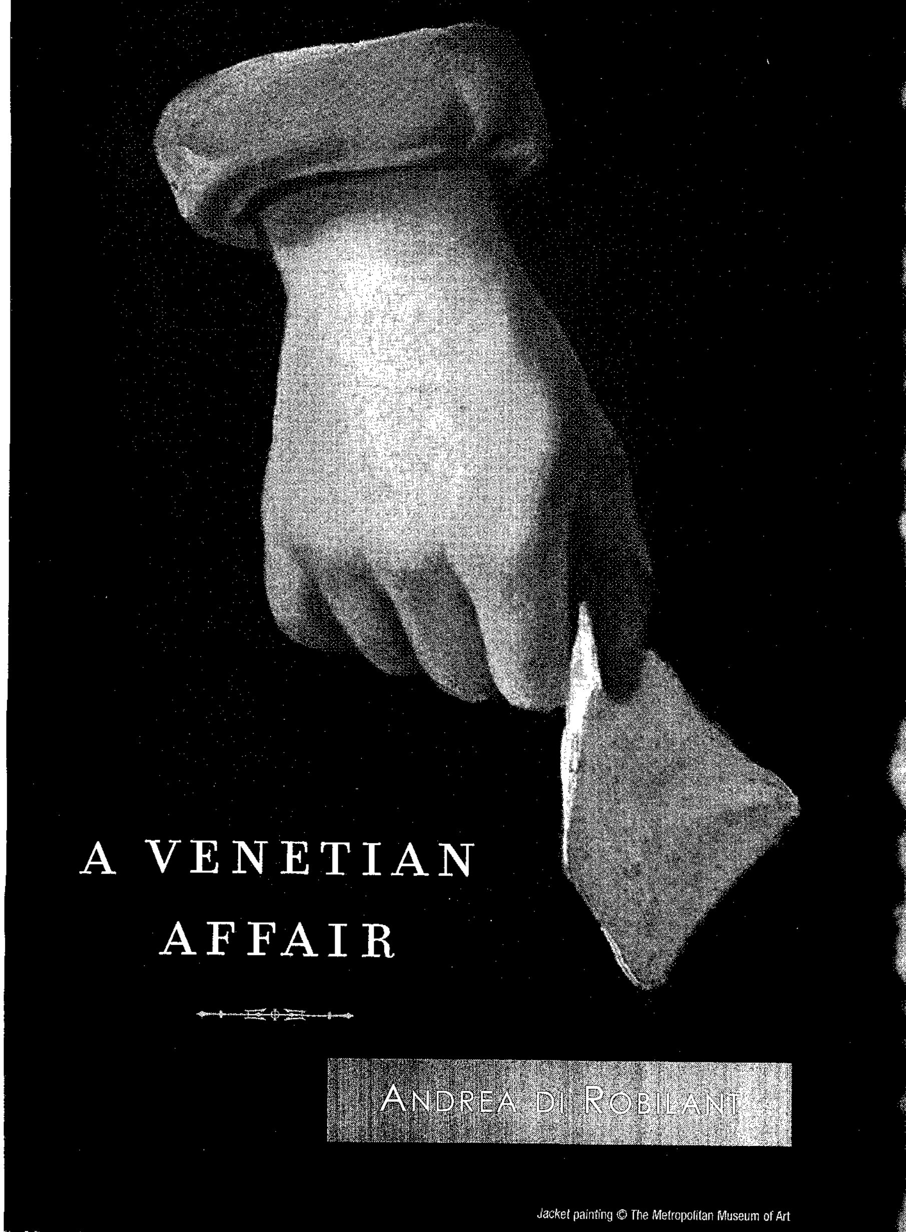
—JOHN CASEY, author of *The Half-Life of Happiness*



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"I'd like to say that A VENETIAN AFFAIR is the best novel I've read in years—

it's almost as good as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* —except that it happens to be true. The story is so immediate, vivid, and powerful that it takes you inside the minds and, indeed, the bodies of its two passionate protagonists. And this, in 18th-century Venice, is an unforgettable place to be."

—SIMON SCHAMA

"Andrea di Robilant brilliantly evokes Venice in the age of Casanova—

masked balls, elegant salons, louche casinos, and social, political, and romantic intrigue. *A Venetian Affair* is luminous, erotic, and utterly spellbinding."

—JOHN BERENDT, author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

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ror.” He absorbed its handlebar curves and heavy paint, mixed them with “Indian Space” inflections, and became, by the time he was twenty, a wunderkind of biomorphism, making eye-popping mythological abstractions that hold their own against anything Rothko or Pollock was doing at the time. This selection, mostly from the late thirties and early forties, showcases Pousette-Dart’s precocity and energy, his exuberantly graphic eye. But only once, in “River Metamorphosis,” does a kind of euphoric pattern congestion seem to hint at the cosmic-spackle style that later made him a pioneer Abstract Expressionist. Through Nov. 5. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.)

Short List

JANET MALCOLM
Bookstein, 50 E. 78th St. 212-439-9605.
Through Nov. 26.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

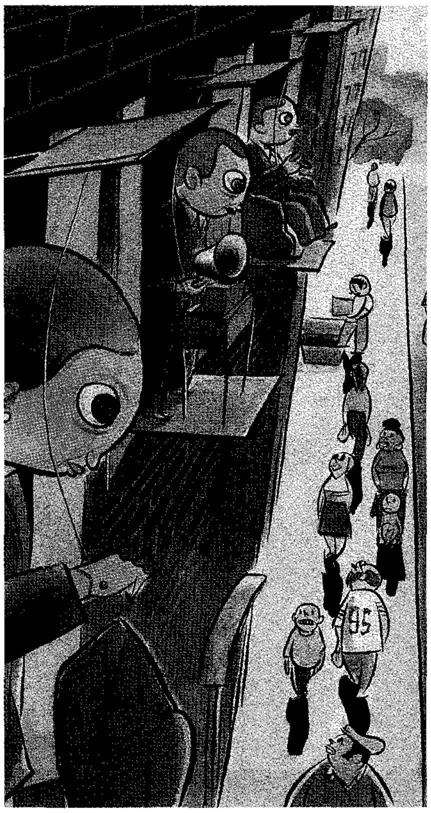
JANINE ANTONI
A grandiose work usually signals a pitfall for Antoni’s sort of installation artist. Two nine-foot steel reels, ballasted with heaps of lead ingots, are propped on inclined planes twenty-four feet apart; a mountainous snarl of fluffy hemp filament (four thousand pounds of it, the gallery says) lies between them. The hemp converges into heavy rope that circles one reel, then stretches to the other (Antoni walked this line at the show’s opening), becoming a rope ladder in the process before devolving back into the tangle. What is being narrated? It’s nearly impossible to care. The work’s two registers—brute materiality and nebulous symbolism—abort each other. Through Oct. 25. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

CHAKAIA BOOKER
From a distance, Booker’s tire sculptures look imposingly formal, with jagged shapes and arches all the pure black of a silhouette. Up close, the surfaces in the exhibition she calls “No More Milk and Cookies” are softly feathered with rubber scales, the tires and inner tubes sliced, diced, julienned, and arranged into a thick diamond-patterned skin that might look at home on a dragon’s wing. The work suggests the upbeat recycling of tire swing and playground, with the occasional sinister sparkle from a frayed steel-belted radial. Through Oct. 18. (Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 212-463-8762.)

TONY GILL
Even for a New Age entrepreneur, Gill has an unusual résumé. He went to art school in London, travelled the world studying Hindu mysticism, then had a Kundalini awakening that dissolved his ego and inspired him to found a global cosmetics company (he’s the Tony of Tony&Tina). For his New York gallery début, Gill offers a suite of big, casually likable canvases. Images of Muhammed Ali and Bagwan Sri Rajneesh appear prominently, along with political emblems and shooting prismatic forms in green, yellow, and pink. While Gill’s company is known for its soothing empowerment tips (“Yellow builds confidence”), his paintings feel fractious and pleasantly mischievous. Through Nov. 1. (Spike, 547 W. 20th St. 212-627-4100.)

JENIFER KOBYLARZ
Kobylarz’s new group of abstract paintings mix electric hues of color-field purity with protractor shapes that recall Monique Prieto. The strategy works better in the smaller paintings, where the strong geometric elements contrast with her characteristic meticulous brushstrokes. The labor-intensive style, in turn, contrasts with gently playful titles such as “Tip Top,” “Steppin’ Out,” and “Love Knot.” Through Oct. 18. (Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 212-691-6565.)

JULIAN LETHBRIDGE
Like spilling, jumbled torrents of matches, Lethbridge’s abstract paintings are composed of hundreds of linear brushstrokes, arranged apparently at random. From a distance the effect is curiously orderly, almost uniform. Up close it’s the opposite: vertiginous, explosive, faintly dizzying. Sometimes a spiral or vertical flow predominates; elsewhere there are mini-patterns, stop-and start sectors like multiple currents of snarled traffic. Lethbridge’s graphic premise and cool pewtery palette recall Jasper Johns’s crosshatch paintings, but these seem less programmatic, more like a kind of mandarin Action painting. Through Oct. 18. (Paula Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)



Clara Williams’s cuckoo-clock-like installation emerges hourly, on 80 Hanson Place, in Brooklyn.

MARCELLUS HALL

KEN PRICE
The West Coast sculptor and ceramist triumphs with a show of ineffably colored, suave, slightly grotesque objects: blobby abstract shapes in fired, painted, and sanded clay, ranging in height from three and a half inches to about two feet. Effects of visceral, antic form and of dematerializing, mutable hue balance perfectly, and so do various aesthetic qualities that are proper to ceramics, sculpture, painting, and—as the little works turn monumental in memory—even architecture. (Frank Gehry has acknowledged being influenced by Price.) While looking at these supremely civilized whatsits, you may feel no wish ever to look at anything else. Through Nov. 1. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

JASON RHOADES
In a topical new exhibition called “Meccatuna,” the *Kunsthalle* wonder boy goes Islamic. Rhoades has built a one-third-scale replica of the Kaaba, the Muslim holy of holies, from a thousand thousand-piece sets of Lego. Of course, that’s not all: the installation also includes sundry furniture, fibreglass donkeys, vastly enlarged camel toe bones, tins of tuna, and five hundred and fifty locker-room colloquialisms for the female genitalia, executed in appropriately garish neon. The result, though it might be mistaken for an eBay warehouse, could also serve as an illustration of pluralism, of globalism, or, more simply, of a kind of happy acquisitive sprawl that represents, especially for certain classes of foreigners, the American ethos. If Rhoades didn’t exist, some European curator would have invented him. Through Oct. 25. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

RICHARD SERRA
Four new sculptures from the Euclid of milled steel. “Wake,” the most spectacular, is a veritable fleet of sinuous, battleship-like toroid forms, forty-six feet long and fourteen feet high. “Blindspot,” the most playful, is a six-walled maze, culminating in a central chamber whose sheltered stillness may strike claustrophobes as pharaonic. All are surprisingly colorful, with grand, Kieferish splashes and striations of red-orange offsetting the blue-gray of their original “mill scale” surface. Enjoy those oxidation effects now. Over the next six or seven years, the steel will darken to a uniform blackish amber, paralleling the works’ inevitable metamorphosis from fresh wonders to twenty-first-century classics. Through Oct. 25. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

JIM SHAW
Twenty-five years’ worth of drawings by a California artist whose irreverence (his version of “The Last Supper” is set in a beach dive) is matched only by his virtuosity. Shaw has never been one for a signature style, and the drawings range from pulp-fiction covers (“Arrows,” a hilarious showdown between corporate suits and dart-wielding natives) to comic strips (the best satirize the artist’s sixties boyhood) to recent calligraphic squiggles that suggest both a tidier and a more dazed Brice Marden. Through Oct. 18. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

"REMEMBRANCE:
RUSSIAN POST-MODERN NOSTALGIA"
The problem for post-Soviet art is that Russia changes so damn quickly: a lithograph of Lenin and Stalin sagely perusing some manifesto in front of a Marlboro logo feels almost as dated as the period it satirizes. The exile’s homeland, on the other hand, never changes: nostalgia, the conceptual anchor of this postmodern survey, traps the homeland in amber. Taking a cue from Soviet iconolatry, the exhibit specializes in unadulterated symbolism—an exit visa as large as a door; the body of Lenin crowned by the head of Mickey Mouse—but it is the works of the Chagall acolyte Natalya Nesterova that best express the show’s theme. The people in her “Dancing People” and “People on the Shore” are made of rivers, hills, and houses—a reminder that the landscape of nostalgia is internal, made of longing for a land that is lost or never existed. Through Feb. 1. (Yeshiva University Museum, at the Center for Jewish History, 15 W. 16th St. 212-294-8330.)

Short List

MATTHEW BLISS
Ziehersmith, 531 W. 25th St. 212-229-1088.
Through Nov. 2.

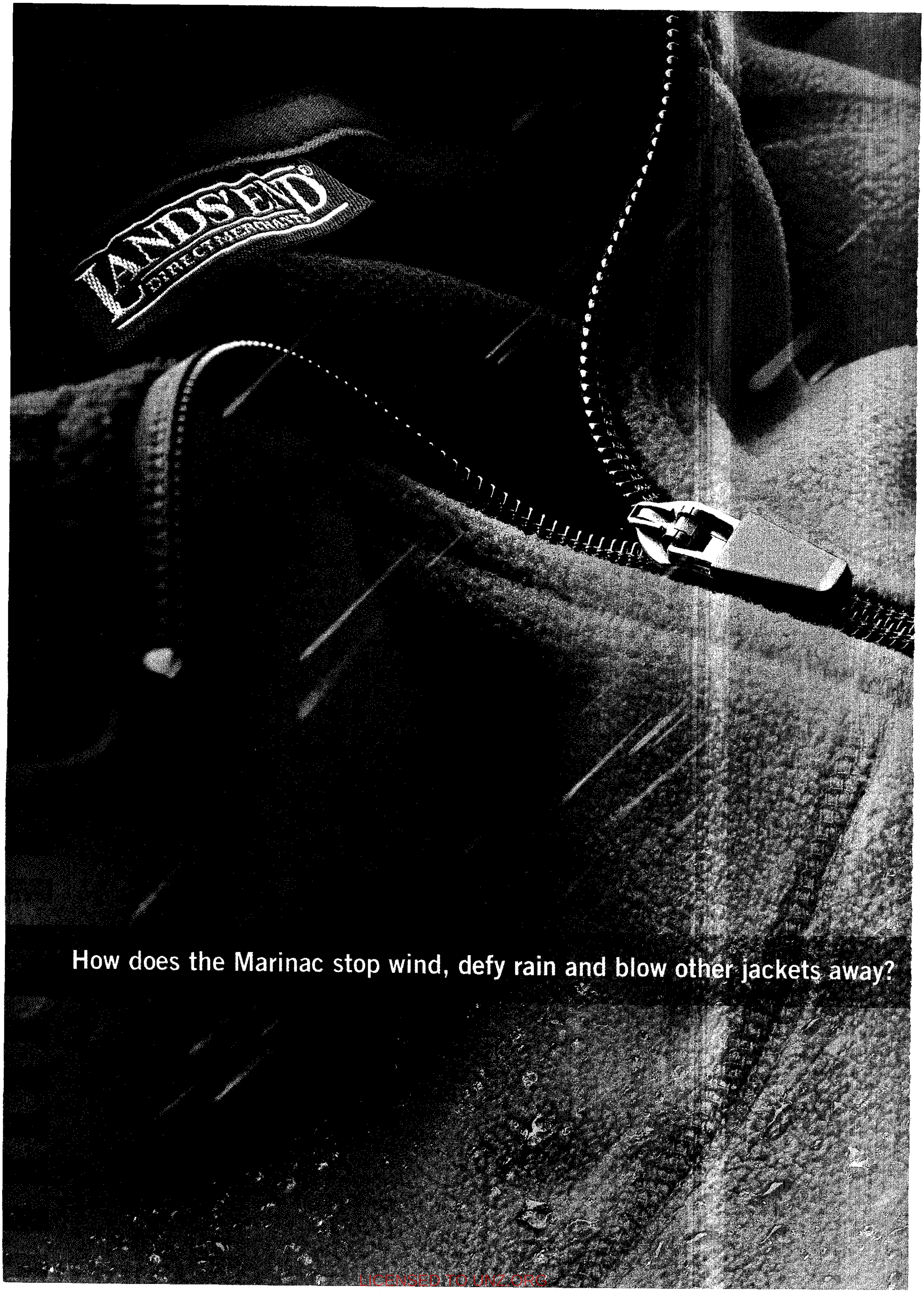
TOBIAS PUTRIH
Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.
Through Nov. 1.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

MICHEL AUDER
Since landing at Warhol’s factory, in 1969, the French-born, New York-based artist has been chronicling his days and nights on video, editing thousands of hours of footage into elliptical tapes that have the fragmentary appeal (and frequent inscrutability) of eavesdropping. In a new series of tapes, most shot in the last three years—a rally in Taiwan, a *fussball* game in Holland, a bonfire upstate—Auder continues his visual free fall, mapping a world that’s all mesmerizing periphery without a core. Through Oct. 26. (Participant, 95 Rivington St. 917-488-0185.)

ALEX KATZ
The word “cartoon” might conjure comic books, but it also refers to a traditional technique used to prepare large-scale paintings: drawings are perforated with tiny holes and then dusted with dry pigment, leaving a trace of line on the surface below. In this revelatory show of Katz’s cartoons, an artist famous for the decisive cool of his portraits gives viewers a glimpse of the fluctuation that precedes them. There’s a spontaneous intimacy to the brown-paper drawings (notably a self-portrait with his wife, Ada) as sketch overlays sketch until a definitive swipe of burnt sienna installs the final image. Through Nov. 15. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 212-343-0441.)

PAUL KOS
A toy train tunnels through a wheel of cheese, microphones are trained on melting blocks of ice, and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a herd of cows demolishes a stack of salt cubes one lick at a time (the latter two pieces are documented in photos and videotape). It all makes for an exceedingly entertaining show. The California conceptualist may lack the name recognition of his peer Bruce Nauman, with whom he shares a fondness for wordplay and integrating sculpture and video, but younger artists have clearly been taking notes (consider Janine Antoni's chocolate lick). Much of the work has a political bent, like the fifteen cuckoo clocks with hammers and sickles dangling from their pendulums, one for every state under Soviet domination during the Cold War. Through Dec. 6. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780.)

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

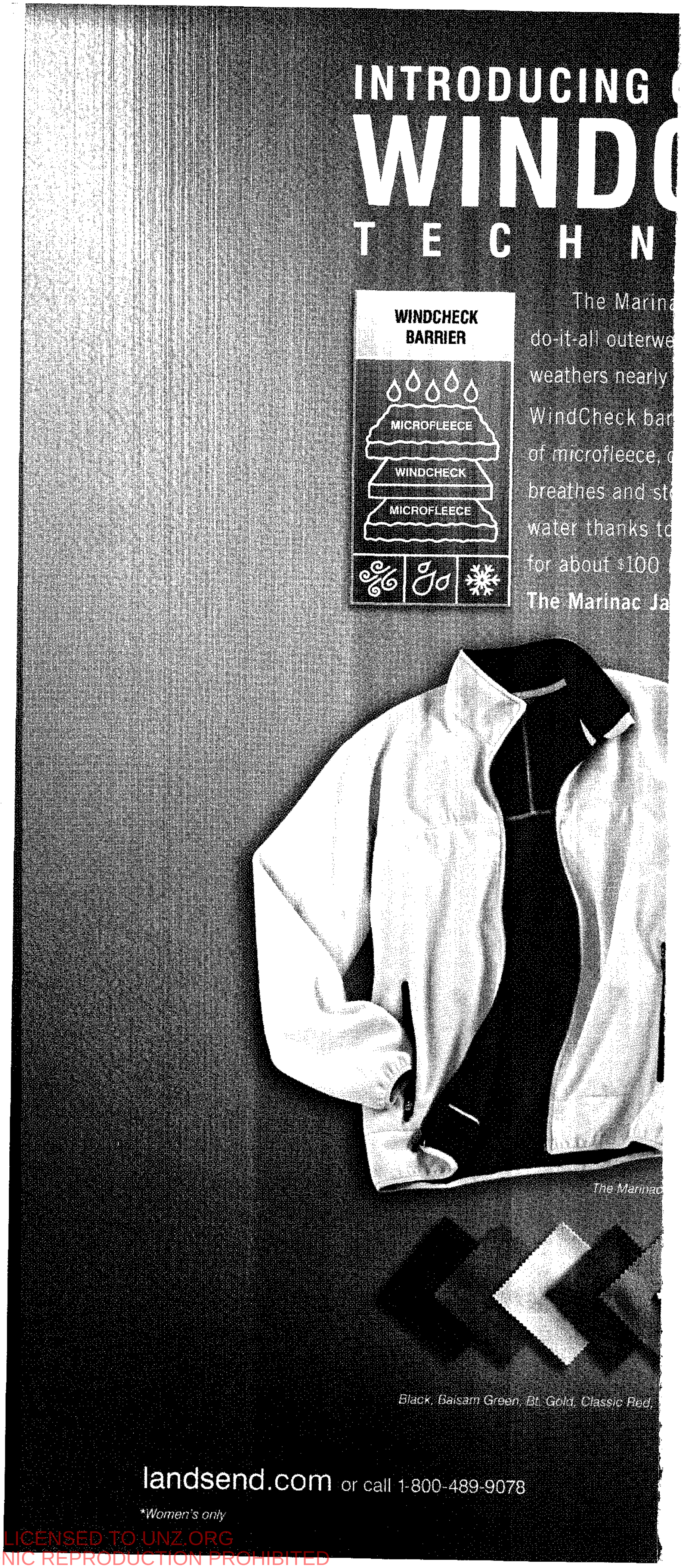
BEN PARRY
Who knew that eight televisions broadcasting white noise could sound so much like artillery fire? The ingenious sleight of machine is the work of Parry, a young artist from Liverpool who specializes in motorized assemblages of found objects. The tubes surround a rocket topped by a spinning doll head, which, depending on your mood, resembles either a frantic citizen trying to keep up with information overload or a sinister android equipped for total surveillance. The works in the outside gallery are even grimmer: Arabic-script Coca-Cola cans arranged in the shape of a submachine gun, a globe outfitted with a gas mask rotating under a tattered umbrella. The pieces are mounted on fire extinguishers, and the whole scene looks ready to explode. Through Oct. 20. (Black & White, 483 Driggs Ave. 718-599-8775.)

CLARA WILLIAMS
80 Arts, an arts center slated to open in 2004, is padlocked, its windows covered with sheet metal, the street-level shutters covered with graffiti. But passersby can still catch a glimpse of the center's talent on the hour, ten times a day, from 11 A.M. to 8: a contemporary cuckoo clock featuring three six-foot-tall marionettes that slowly cantilever out over the third-floor windows. The trio, loosely adapted from "The Price," Arthur Miller's 1968 play about a family breaking up a Brooklyn town house, unfold their gawky limbs in a sonata of creaks and retreat with nothing resolved—a fanciful allusion to the fate of the neighborhood and its recent demographic shifts. Through Oct. 26. (80 Hanson Pl. For more information call the Public Art Fund, at 212-980-4575.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

BRIAN FINKE
There's no football and no acrobatics—no action at all, really—in Finke's saturated, static portraits of high-school and college football players and cheerleaders. The richly colored photos (for which Finke augmented the natural late-afternoon sunlight with strobes) capture with perfect clarity their subjects' sharp-edged, bright-eyed anticipatory giddiness; everyone seems breathless with suspense. It would have been easy to make these photos a polemic about gender roles and sports, but Finke is wise enough to realize that the American football field may be a place where men and women find themselves united in a common goal. Here, football players and cheerleaders share both an untamped zealotry and a remarkable lack of irony; the men are determined and vacant, and the women, with their clownlike showgirl makeup and stiff, crunchy curls, are both haglike and world-weary. Through Nov. 1. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

STEPHEN SHORE
These handsome, restrained pictures—all but one of which date from the nineteen-seventies and were taken as part of Shore's "Uncommon Places" series—depict an America both familiar and oddly foreign, not unlike a Hollywood interpretation of the heartland. Documenting the objects and places of various American towns with the wonder and



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Sculptures made primarily of tires, by Chakaia Booker, at Marlborough.

clarity of a foreign visitor not yet acclimated to his new surroundings, the pictures are flooded with incredible, big-sky light. By this point, Shore has spawned so many imitators that his subjects and landscapes—thin-mouthed old people, a chipped mint-green ranch house, an empty highway under a tumbling whorl of cloud—all have the ring of the familiar, though Shore's unironic matter-of-factness is distinctly his. Particularly fine is "J.J. Summers Ajency," a Hopperesque picture of a blank storefront, its muted colors soft and velvety. There's nothing harsh or snarky about these pictures—even a TV, on its blond-wood stand, appears dignified. Through Oct. 25. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO
These large-scale, blurred black-and-white photographs of iconic buildings are so incomparably beautiful and tactile that looking almost isn't enough; one yearns to reach out and touch them. The photos are reductive, but in the best possible way; the structures are distinct enough to be recognizable, but, as they're stripped of their usual accoutrements (sunlight, color, people), we're invited to see them anew, and the experience is both startling and intoxicatingly disorienting. The buildings themselves appear inscrutable and surprisingly organic, as complex and unfathomable as any human being. Who knew, for example, that the Guggenheim Bilbao, without its hard titanium gleam, could be revealed as a sinuous crustacean's carapace, its bulk both menacing and touchingly awkward? Sugimoto is a master of light and shadows, and these photos—rendered in soft shades of silver and gray—are simply wondrous. Through Nov. 1. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

Short List

ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE
Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.
Through Oct. 18.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Oct. 17 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Watches, wristwatches, and clocks. ♦ Oct. 17 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Photographs from the collection of the late James J. Rochlis, including works by Edward Weston, Man Ray, and Ansel Adams. ♦ Oct. 20 at 10:15 A.M. and 2 and Oct. 21 at 10:15 A.M.: English furniture, ceramics, and decorations from the New Mexico home of the Dowager Duchess of Bedford. ♦ Oct. 21 at 7: Like the clothes he designed, the home furnishings of the fashion icon Bill Blass, who died last June, conveyed a sense of casual American luxury that denoted wealth, status, and ease. This huge sale of furniture, art work, and bibelots from Blass's collection (which continues Oct. 22-23) includes a seventeenth-century Dutch painting depicting an aerial view of the siege of Vercelli and a Roman marble bust of a young man from the Julio-Claudian period, along with such oddities as a collection of wooden models of staircases and a Japanese giant lobster in coppered bronze. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Oct. 15 at 10 A.M. and 2: High-carat-count jewelry, including a ruby-and-diamond necklace owned by Eva Perón that became a fixture of official portraits and commemorative stamps. ♦ Oct. 20 at 2: A collection of classic photographs by Evans, Avedon, Doisneau, Man Ray, and others. One hopes the same party might acquire both Ansel Adams's apocalyptic shot of the Tetons and Garry Winogrand's laughing enchantress in "Women Are Beautiful" and hang them side by side—their exultance in natural beauty is as mutual as their methods are unalike. ♦ Oct. 21 at 10 A.M.: Fine and decorative art works from Russia and by Russian artists, largely from the Imperial period. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

PHILLIPS
Oct. 16 at 10 A.M. and 2: The fortunes of this upstart house may be hard to follow, but photography has emerged as one of its strong suits. The new season begins with items from the Joshua P. Smith collection. ♦ Oct. 17 at 7 and Oct. 18 at 10 A.M. and 2: A three-part sale of photographs. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

SWANN
Oct. 16 at 10:30 A.M.: A complete edition of Fitzgerald's "The Cruise of the Rolling Junk" (a humorous, three-part magazine article describing a trip with Zelda from Connecticut to Alabama in a broken-down car) and a signed, first-edition copy of Joyce's "Ulysses" are the highlights of a sale of books. ♦ Oct. 21 at 10:30 A.M.: Photographs. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

PARK AVENUE ANTIQUES SHOW
The Wendy firm's latest presentation, a show featuring forty-five international dealers offering furniture, silver, paintings, jewelry, and a range of other items. (Wallace Hall, Park Ave. at 84th St. 914-698-3442. Oct. 16-19.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Le Nozze di Figaro," with Alexandra Deshorties, Dorothea Röschmann, Jossie Pérez, John Relyea, and Dwayne Croft; James Levine conducts. (Oct. 15 at 8.) ♦ With Anja Harteros and Katarina Karnéus replacing Deshorties and Pérez. (Oct. 18 at 8.) ♦ John Dexter's singing-dancing triple bill **"Stravinsky"** (comprising "Le Sacre du Printemps," "Le Rossignol," and "Oedipus Rex") returns to the house, featuring, in various roles, the singers Stephanie Blythe, Olga Makarina, Ronald Naldi, Robert Gambill, Evgenij Nikitin, and Eric Halfvarson, the dancers Julie Kent and Damian Woetzel, and the actor Philip Bosco. Doug Varone provides some dauntingly athletic new choreography for "Le Sacre"; Valery Gergiev conducts all three works. (Oct. 16 at 8.) ♦ How strange that Renée Fleming is just now singing her first Violetta at the Met; the rare opulence of her voice finally gives Franco Zeffirelli's production of **"La Traviata"** the musical luxuries it demands. Gergiev conducts his first Met take on Verdi's score, drawing out lush yet fevered lines of disquiet; Ramón Vargas's début Alfredo is attractively workmanlike (if vocally average); and Dmitri Hvorostovsky's seasoned Germont bleeds with dark, fatherly dignity. (Oct. 17 at 8.) ♦ With Rolando Villazon (in his début) replacing Vargas; Paul Nadler conducts. (Oct. 21 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème"** returns to the repertory, with Hei-Kyung Hong, Zvetelina Vassileva, Roberto Aronica, and Richard Zeller; Daniel Oren. (Oct. 18 at 1:30.) ♦ The first performance this season of **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** features Susanne Mentzer as Rosina, leading a cast that also includes Antonino Siragusa (a début), Russell Braun, and John Del Carlo; Bruno Campanella. (Oct. 20 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The Paul Kellogg regime at City Opera has always had a silly streak, but Mark Lamos's new production of **"La Finta Giardiniera"** goes too far. Attempting to remedy the unwieldy libretto of the eighteen-year-old Mozart's lovely but infrequently performed opera, the director recasts this muddled aristocratic comedy as a single extended mad scene set in a spa for wayward lovers; the pants role of Ramiro is transformed into that of a cross-dressing lesbian. Lamos runs his singers through some amusing sex gags, but most of the already complicated plot is rendered unintelligible, and the fine singing of Lisa Saffer, Brenda Harris, and Julianne Borg provides the only true enjoyment to be found onstage; George Manahan's brisk conducting has never been more welcome. (Oct. 16 at 7:30.) ♦ Sanford Sylvan, a baritone of soothing sound and rich experience, takes the role of the Speaker in a revival of Lotfi Mansouri's production of **"The Magic Flute"** (sung in English), anchoring the efforts of an engaging young cast that features Jennifer Aylmer, Amanda Pabyan, Tonna Miller, John McVeigh, Dean Anthony, Philip Cutlip, and Gustav Andreassen in the leading roles; Steven Mosteller conducts. (Oct. 17 at 8.) ♦ The tenor Anthony Dean Griffey leads the cast of Carlisle Floyd's **"Of Mice and Men"** (based on the Steinbeck novel), which also features Joel Sorensen, Nancy Allen Lundy, and Rod Nelman; Willie Anthony Waters. (Oct. 18 at 1:30.) ♦ Jonathan Miller's rollicking production of **"The Mikado"** returns to the house, featuring Anna Christy, Myrna Paris, Keith Jameson, Richard Suart, and Jan Opalach (in the title role); Gerald Steichen. (Oct. 18 at 8.) ♦ **"Carmen,"** with Hadar Halevy and Michael Hendrick as Carmen and Don José, Angela Fout as Micaëla, and Kelly Anderson as Escamillo; Steven White. (Oct. 19 at 1:30 and Oct. 21 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-870-5570.)

PETER HAMLIN

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Osmo Vänskä, the much talked about new music director of the Minnesota Orchestra, makes his Philharmonic début conducting a concert that includes an important farewell—that of Alicia de Larrocha, who will offer Haydn's Piano Concerto in D Major and her signature piece, Falla's "Nights in the Gardens of Spain," in what has been announced as her final concert with the orchestra. Nielsen's Fifth Symphony concludes the program. (Oct. 15-16 at 7:30 and Oct. 17-18 at 8.) ♦ Lorin Maazel, striding into his second season at the Philharmonic, solidifies his position with a three-week Beethoven festival that will offer a chronological tour of all the symphonies and piano concertos. Reasonable people can disagree as to the necessity of the endeavor—Kurt Masur offered a similar Beethoven bash just five seasons back—but Maazel's traversal of the concertos offers a generous sampling of keyboard talent, from masters like Krystian Zimmerman to the young Gianluca Cascioli (making his début). Rudolf Buchbinder is first in line, performing the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-Flat Major (which the composer wrote before the Concerto No. 1) on a program that also features the Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2. (Oct. 21 and Oct. 23 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
Christoph von Dohnányi, having transferred his flag from the Cleveland Orchestra to this venerable London ensemble (which he serves as principal conductor), leads a proudly Germanic program of Haydn (the Symphony No. 102 in B-Flat Major), Wagner, and Brahms (the First Symphony). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 at 8.)

"CANTATAS IN CONTEXT"
Mary Greer, an up-and-coming conductor and musicologist in the mold of Christopher Hogwood (with whom she worked at Boston's Handel and Haydn Society), leads the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the New York Baroque Soloists in three Bach cantatas for the season of Pentecost: Nos. 74, 172, and 34 ("O ewiges Feuer"). Ilana Davidson and Benjamin Sosland are among the vocal soloists. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. 212-378-0248. Oct. 19 at 3.)

CHORAL SYMPHONY SOCIETY
David Labovitz conducts the orchestra and the New York Cantata Singers in an afternoon of choral works by Mozart (including the "Ave verum corpus"). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Oct. 19 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Oct. 20 at 8: Has the group once labelled "the Aristocrat of Orchestras" retained any collective memory of its glorious Francophone past? One hopes so, since its next Carnegie Hall offering (with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus) is a concert performance of Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande," conducted by Bernard Haitink. The cast is stunning: Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (in her début as Mélisande) and Simon Keenlyside are the doomed young couple, with Nathalie Stutzmann, Gerald Finley, and John Tomlinson filling out the leading roles. ♦ Oct. 21 at 8: Conductor and chorus return for an all-Beethoven concert featuring the "Choral Fantasy" (with the pianist Dubravka Tomsic) and the Symphony No. 5. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

"CHAMBER MUSIC AT THE Y"
Ned Rorem's "The Unquestioned Answer"—an Ivesian play on words and one of the most affecting of his recent pieces—is the highlight of a concert by the violinist Jaime Laredo, the clarinettist Michael Rusineck, the cellist Sharon Robinson, and friends that also includes music by Schubert (the Octet), Mozart, and Haydn. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 14-15 at 8.)

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NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG

The often irreverent New York School of poets—including Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, and John Ashbery—glittered their way through the literary landscape of the fifties and sixties, providing a much needed counterweight to the more tormented musings of the confessional crowd. The festival celebrates their work with a bouquet of song settings by some of the usual suspects (Bolcom, Rorem, Bernstein, et al.), along with newer fare by Paul Moravec and Mason Bates. Amy Burton, Philip Cutlip, and Joseph Kaiser are the singers; Steven Blier and Michael Barrett accompany them. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 15 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC

Oct. 16 and Oct. 18 at 7:30: The pianist Nina Lelchuk offers a Chopin program. ♦ Oct. 17 at 7:30 and Oct. 19 at 4: Music by Bach starts off a program of modern works (Crumb, Martinů, Villa-Lobos) performed by the flute-cello-piano ensemble Trio Mosaique. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

JERUSALEM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Three nights of modern and classic repertory from this young festival (founded in 1998), whose varied programming has been welcomed by its home audience. The repertory includes music by Carter, Berio, Hindemith, and Schubert; the violinist Nikolaj Znaider and the pianist Yefim Bronfman are among the performers. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 16 and Oct. 18-19 at 7:30.)

MATTHIAS KAUL / ULRICH KRIEGER

Two of Germany's more prominent musical radicals (on percussion and saxophone, respectively) take the stage for the "Interpretations" series' latest split program, which includes music by Alvin Lucier and by the performers themselves. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 16 at 8.)

ZOLTÁN KOCSIS

The renowned pianist, in his only New York recital of the season, offers music by Beethoven, Schubert, and Liszt. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Oct. 16 at 8.)

BEAUX ARTS TRIO: "THE ART OF MENAHEM PRESSLER"

In the first concert of a five-part series, the Metropolitan Museum of Art offers an eightieth-birthday tribute to the pianist, whose gentlemanly manner belies a musical mind of sparkling fantasy and persuasive logic. His young colleagues, the violinist Daniel Hope and the cellist Antonio Meneses, join him in music by Rachmaninoff and Schubert (the Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 99). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 18 at 8.)

SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND

This old-shoe chamber series, hosted by a French-style country inn nestled among the yacht slips and shore restaurants of City Island, takes a walk on the wild side this week, offering a performance of Schubert's Trio in B-Flat Major played from memory by the pianist Adrienne Kim, the violinist Jesse Mills, and the cellist Robert LaRue. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. 212-724-4474. Oct. 19 at 12:30.)

MUSIC BEFORE 1800: THE KING'S NOYSE

Paul O'Dette, on lute and theorbo, joins the Baroque string band in music by Vecchi, Zannetti, and others, along with some virtuoso solos. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 19 at 4.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

The bassist and composer Edgar Meyer is the star of the Society's latest concert, joining the violinist Ani Kavafian and other musicians for a program of Brahms, Schubert (the "Trout" Quintet, with the pianist André Watts as special guest), and his own Trio No. 1 for Violin, Cello, and Bass. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Oct. 19 at 5 and Oct. 21 at 7:30.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Music sweet and sharp by Schubert, Verdi, and Carter and Harbison (their magnificent Elizabeth Bishop settings "A Mirror on Which to Dwell" and "North and South"). Marjorie Elinor Dix, Jennifer Welch-Babidge, and Gregory Turay are the singers; James Levine conducts. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 19 at 5.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS

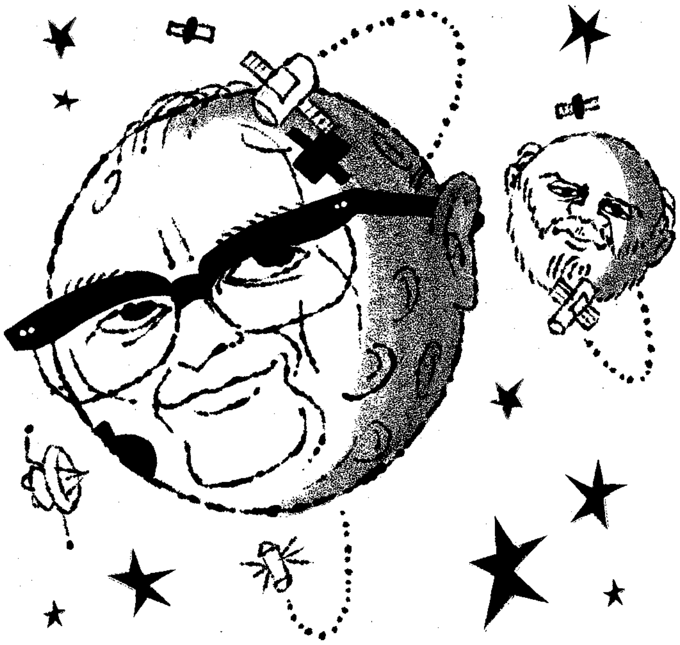
The saxophonist Harvey Pittel and the clarinettist Charles Neidich join the Players for music by Mozart, Milhaud ("Scaramouche," for saxophone and wind quintet), and Walton ("Façade," with Janet Bookspan narrating). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Oct. 20 at 2 and 7:30.)

JOYCE DIDONATO

A New York solo début recital from the mezzo-soprano, a favorite at La Scala as well as City Opera, who sings music by Heggie, Haydn, Rossini, Bernstein, and Obradors. Brian Zeger accompanies her. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

IVO POGORELICH

The pianist, as renowned for his interpretive eccentricity as for his florid virtuosity, offers sonatas by Beethoven (the "À Therese" and the Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111) along with music by Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 20 at 8.)



Arthur C. Clarke and Arthur C. Danto in "Far Out," a satellite-enhanced talk about images from outer space.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

CONCERTANTE

Music by Mozart, Zemlinsky, and Brahms (the String Quintet in G Major), played by some of New York's more illustrious strings-about-town (including the cellist Sophie Shao). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 21 at 8.)

DOUBLE PLAY

A bevy of premières by Ross Bauer, Eric Moe, Barbara White, and other composers of the modernist persuasion, performed by the percussion duo of Dominic Donato and Stephen Paysen in the intimate Thalia Theatre. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 21 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

D.U.M.B.O. ART UNDER THE BRIDGE FESTIVAL

The seventh installment of this lively annual gathering on the industrial shores of Brooklyn includes video projections, dance and musical performances, installations in the East River, open studios, artists' talks, and the like. See also the talk about the effect of the arts on Brooklyn, below. (Dumbo, Brooklyn. Oct. 17-19. For more information, call 718-694-0831 or visit www.dumboartscenter.org.)

READINGS

Oct. 15 at 6:30: The actor Oliver Platt, the writer Susanna Moore, and the photographer Richard Avedon join Alec Wilkinson for a dramatic reading of the title piece in Wilkinson's new collection of essays, "Mr. Apology." (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 19 at 2: Benjamin (Laughing Boy) Deyo and David (Lefty) Leibowitz offer selections from their account of their various adventures, "Invisible Frontier: Exploring the Tunnels, Ruins, and Rooftops of Hidden New York." (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.) ♦ Oct. 20 at 7: The short-story writer Junot Díaz joins Patrick Rosal for the Poetry Society of America's "Writers on Poets" series. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery, between Bleecker and Houston Sts. For more information, call 212-254-9628.) ♦ Oct. 20 at 7 and 9: The "Beyond Words: Stories on Stage" reading series presents two bills of pre-Halloween material. The early show includes the poet David Lehman and the doctor and writer Sheri Fink; the late show features the writer Andy Christie and the television personality Bill Boggs, among others. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-647-0202.) ♦ Oct. 20 at 8: Peter Matthiessen (of *The Paris Review*), Paula Deitz, Frederick Morgan, and Dana Gioia (*The Hudson Review*), and Robert Silvers, Barbara Epstein, and James Fenton (*The New York Review of Books*) celebrate the fiftieth, fifty-fifth, and fortieth anniversaries of their respective journals. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

TALKS

Oct. 15 at 6: Following a screening of his documentary "The Ten-Year Lunch: The Legend of the Algonquin Round Table," Aviva Slesin talks about the New York literary scene circa 1925. (Small Press Center, the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, 20 W. 44th St. 212-764-7021.) ♦ Oct. 15 at 6:30: The writer Kurt Andersen moderates a discussion considering the economic impact artists have had on Brooklyn with the Realtor Barbara Corcoran, the musician John Flansburgh, the developer David Walentas, the writer Robert Lanham, and others. (Memorial Hall, Pratt Institute, 200 Willoughby Ave., Brooklyn. For reservations, call 718-636-3657.) ♦ Oct. 20 at 7:30: The New York Institute for the Humanities and the Hayden Planetarium present "Far Out," a viewing and discussion of the spectacular images collected by far-flung spacecraft. The participants include the science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke (by video satellite from his home in Sri Lanka), the art critic Arthur C. Danto, the photographer Joel Meyerowitz, and Michael Benson, the author of the new coffee-table book "Beyond: Visions of the Interplanetary Probes." (Le Frak Theatre, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St. at Central Park W. For reservations, call 212-769-5200.)

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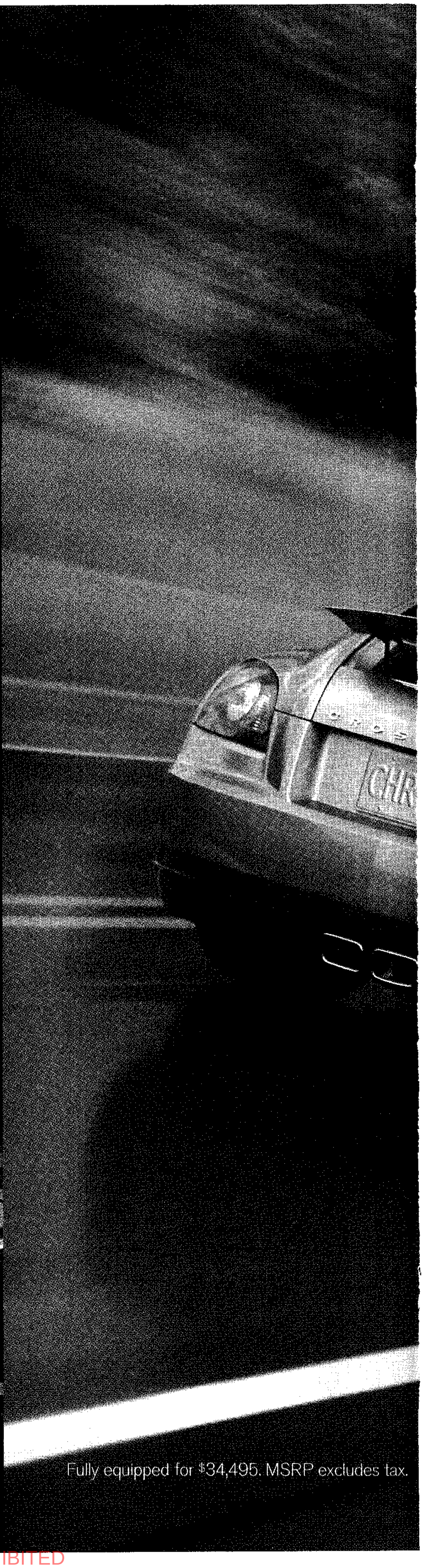

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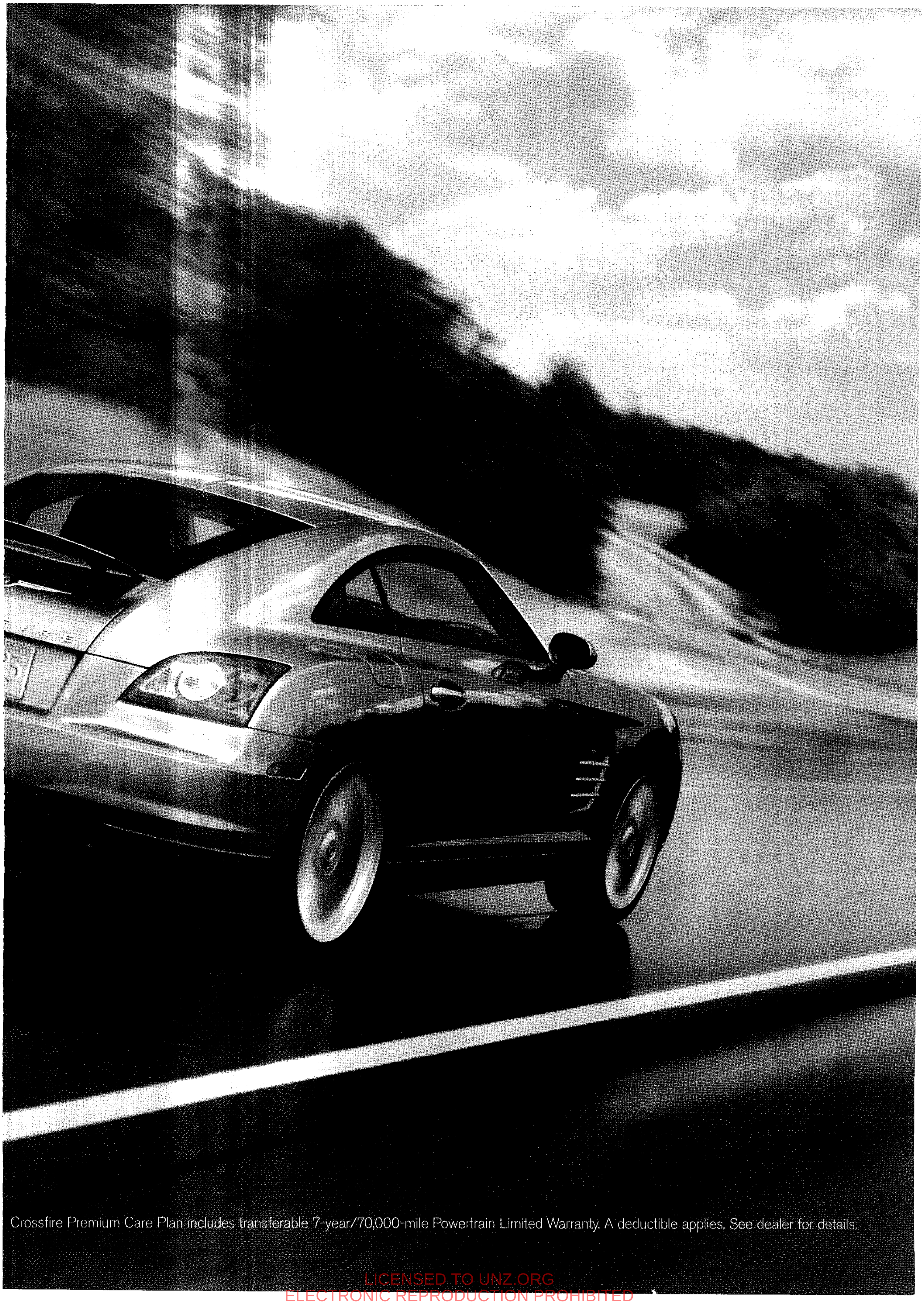

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MOVIES OPENING

KHACHATURIAN
A documentary about the Armenian-born Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian, directed by Peter Rosen. Opening Oct. 17. (Quad Cinema.)

PIECES OF APRIL
Peter Hedges wrote and directed this drama about a bohemian daughter (Katie Holmes) who invites her ailing mother (Patricia Clarkson) and family over for Thanksgiving dinner at her New York apartment. Opening Oct. 17.

PREY FOR ROCK AND ROLL
Gina Gershon plays the leader of an all-girl Los Angeles rock band, in a musical drama directed by Alex Steyermark. Opening Oct. 17.

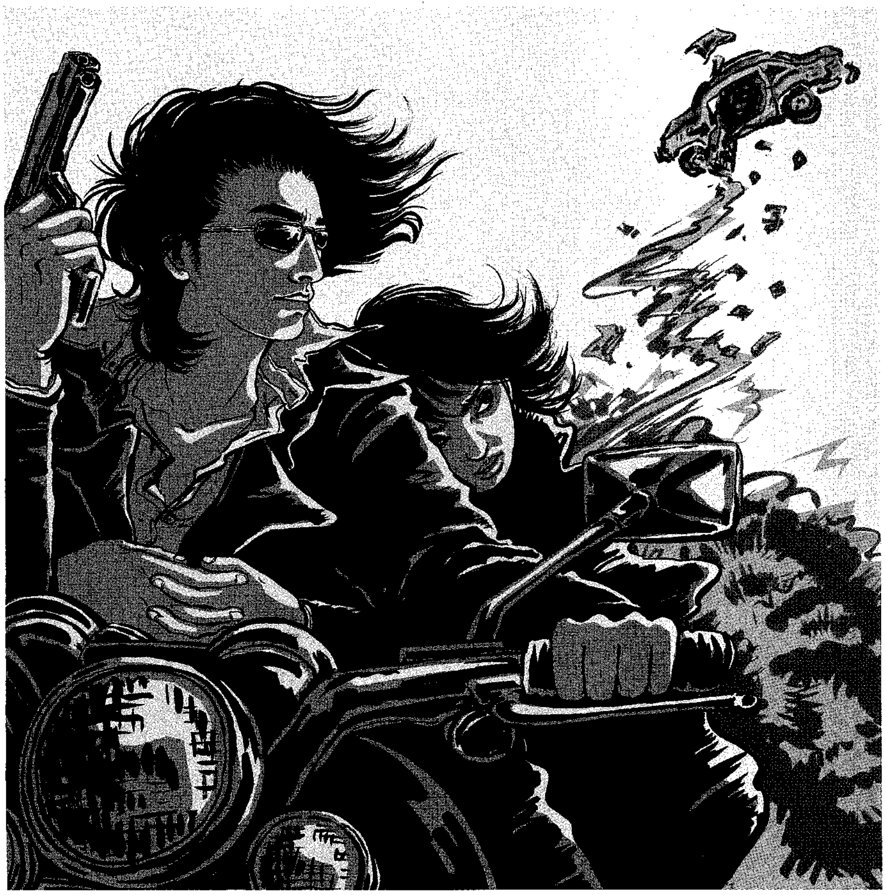
RETURNER
A science-fiction film written and directed by Takashi Yamazaki, in which a "returner" (Ann Suzuki) travels backward in time to save the human race. In Japanese. Opening Oct. 17.

RUNAWAY JURY
Gary Fleder directed this thriller, adapted from the John Grisham novel, about a jury consultant (Gene Hackman) who attempts to manipulate the outcome of a high-stakes trial. With Dustin Hoffman, Rachel Weisz, and John Cusack. Opening Oct. 17.

SYLVIA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 17. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

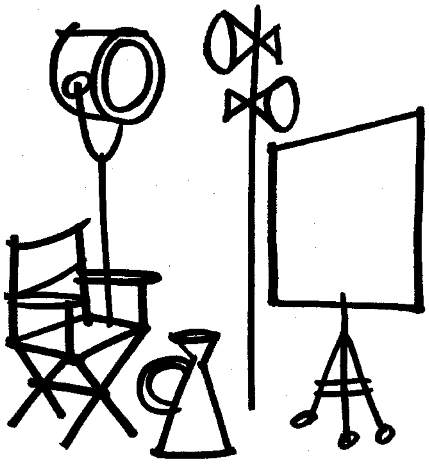
THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE
A homicidal maniac terrorizes a group of teenagers in a horror film inspired by the original 1974 slasher flick. Directed by Marcus Nispel. Opening Oct. 17.

VERONICA GUERIN
Cate Blanchett plays the Irish journalist who wrote exposés of the Dublin drug trade and was murdered in 1996, in a bio-pic directed by Joel Schumacher. Opening Oct. 17.



Takeshi Kaneshiro and Ann Suzuki in "Returner," opening October 17.

YUKO SHIMIZU



FILM NOTES

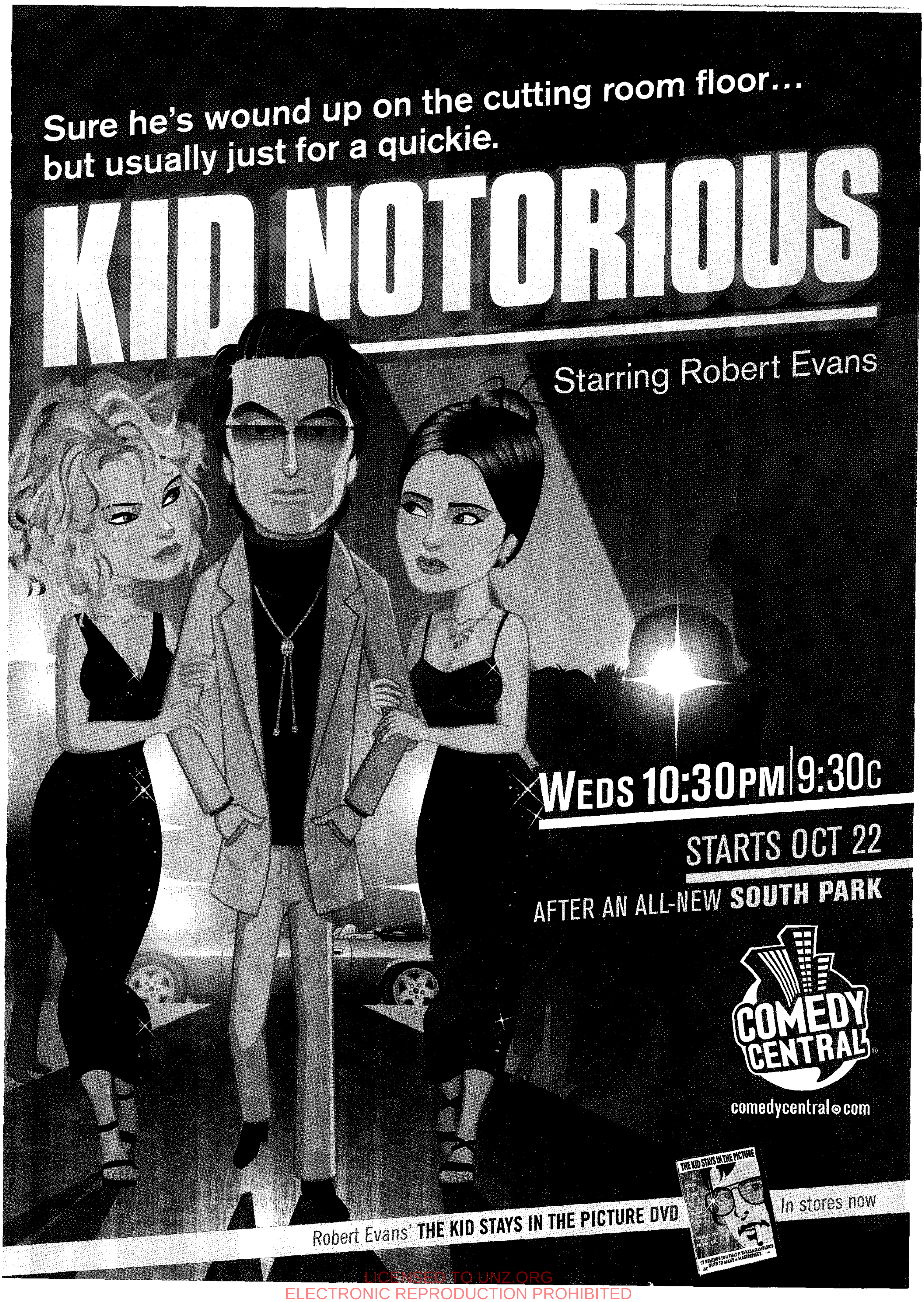
AMERICAN SPLENDOR
Well, it's different. Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, directing together, have made a drama-documentary in which the drama and the documentary look at each other but don't touch. The movie is about Harvey Pekar, a real and rusted-up gentleman from Cleveland. He works as a filing clerk, and his experiences have long been the subject of a comic strip, illustrated by—among others—Robert Crumb. So we get a good dose of Harvey. But we get an even better and funnier dose of Paul Giamatti, who plays an alternative Harvey, and who is framed, or sometimes drawn, in fond imitation of a comic book—the implication being that even the cruddiest lives can, in sympathetic hands, acquire shape and grace. The story, such as it is, moves from Harvey the record collector to Harvey the cancer sufferer to Harvey the chat-show guest. There is terrific supporting work from Hope Davis as Mrs. Pekar and from Judah Friedlander as Harvey's profoundly unusual friend Toby. Mild fame may have patronized these folks, but the movie pays them a comic homage that feels flattering, fast-witted, and true.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/18 & 25/03.) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.)

ANYTHING ELSE
Better than the last two Woody Allen films, but still not very interesting. Falk (Jason Biggs), a young New York comedy writer, is saddled with a couple of draining relationships: his agent (Danny DeVito) doesn't find him much work yet makes him feel horribly guilty, and his girlfriend, Amanda (Christina Ricci), is a hapless liar and narcissist. When he's not fencing miserably with these two, Falk takes long walks in Central Park with Dobel (Allen), another aspiring comedy writer who's as full of advice as Nestor and Polonius combined. The two men natter on, and the camera moves fluently through the park. The rest of the movie, however, feels like a rather nagging play: people barge in and out of Falk's apartment, crowding against each other in a statically photographed set. We keep waiting for some sort of fiction to take hold, or a character to develop, but young Falk is so bland and accommodating that he hardly seems worth putting at the center of a movie, and Ricci's duplicitous Amanda never changes from one lying moment to another.—*David Denby* (9/29/03) (Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Street Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT
The dialogue has the creaky sound of classy, over-civilized theatre; the film is just barely adapted from Clemence Dane's play about a father and daughter doomed by hereditary insanity—the kind of play in which the daughter is named Sydney Fairchild, her father Hilary Fairchild, and the daughter's boyfriend Kit. But as Sydney, Katharine Hepburn, in her film début, was like nothing that had ever been seen on the screen. It wasn't that she was good, exactly (in fact, her acting was mostly awful), but she was so angular and mannered, with her mouth a scar of suffering, that she was riveting. And John Barrymore, who plays the father, was a fairly riveting performer himself—though his role here is drearily subservient. Young George Cukor directed, in the insulated style all too appropriate to the material. Originally released in 1932.—*Pauline Kael* (Gramercy Theatre; Oct. 19.)

GLEN OR GLENDA
Inadvertent, lunatic bargain-basement camp. The writer-director, Edward D. Wood, Jr., pitches this earnest 1953 study of transvestism to an audience that had recently been shocked by Christine Jorgensen's sex-change operation. The opening titles promise a movie of "stark realism." The first sign of stark realism is Bela Lugosi, surrounded by skulls and a skeleton, declaiming about "man's constant groping of things unknown." The movie eventually homes in on the case history of Glen or Glenda (played by Wood himself), who starts out wearing his sister's dress and ends up appropriating her whole wardrobe. Lugosi pops up repeatedly and warns, "Beware of the big green dragon that sits on your doorstep. He eats little boys, puppy dogs' tails, and big fat snails!" He seems to be in Transylvania, but an entire Sorbonne of semiologists couldn't figure out exactly where this movie's images come from.—*Michael Sragow* (Moving Image; Oct. 19.)

KILL BILL—VOL. 1
In this Quentin Tarantino fantasy pastiche of samurai and martial-arts films, the trunk of a body, its head lopped off, will spurt blood like a fountain. We know that the non-stop violence is not meant to be real: for starters, the blood looks like cranberry juice. Yet Tarantino is working in a photographic medium, and the real-world associations are not so easy to shrug off. Tarantino's heroine, Uma Thurman, kills another female warrior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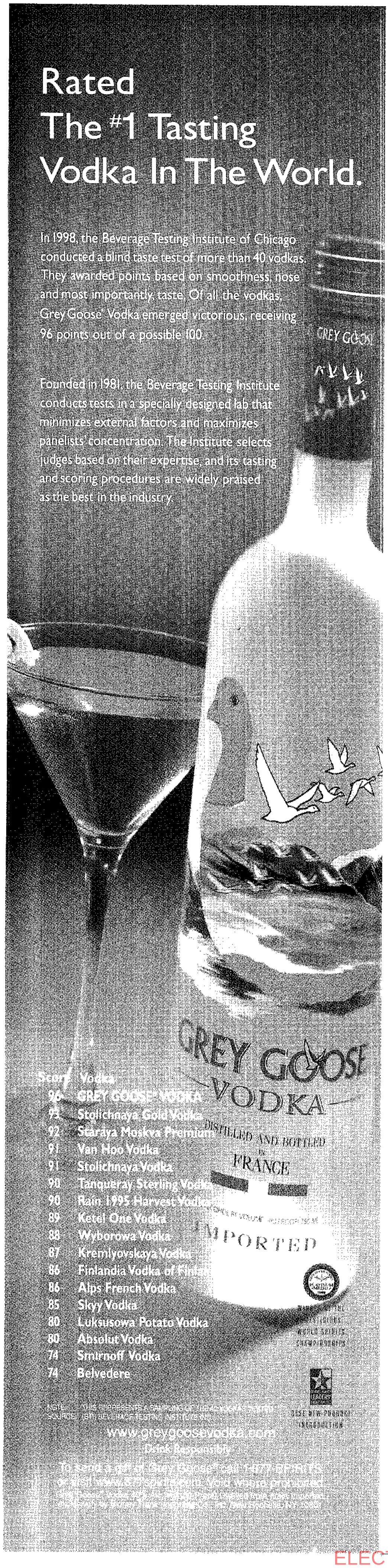

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88	Wyborowa Vodka
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86	Alps French Vodka
85	Skyy Vodka
80	Luksusowa Potato Vodka
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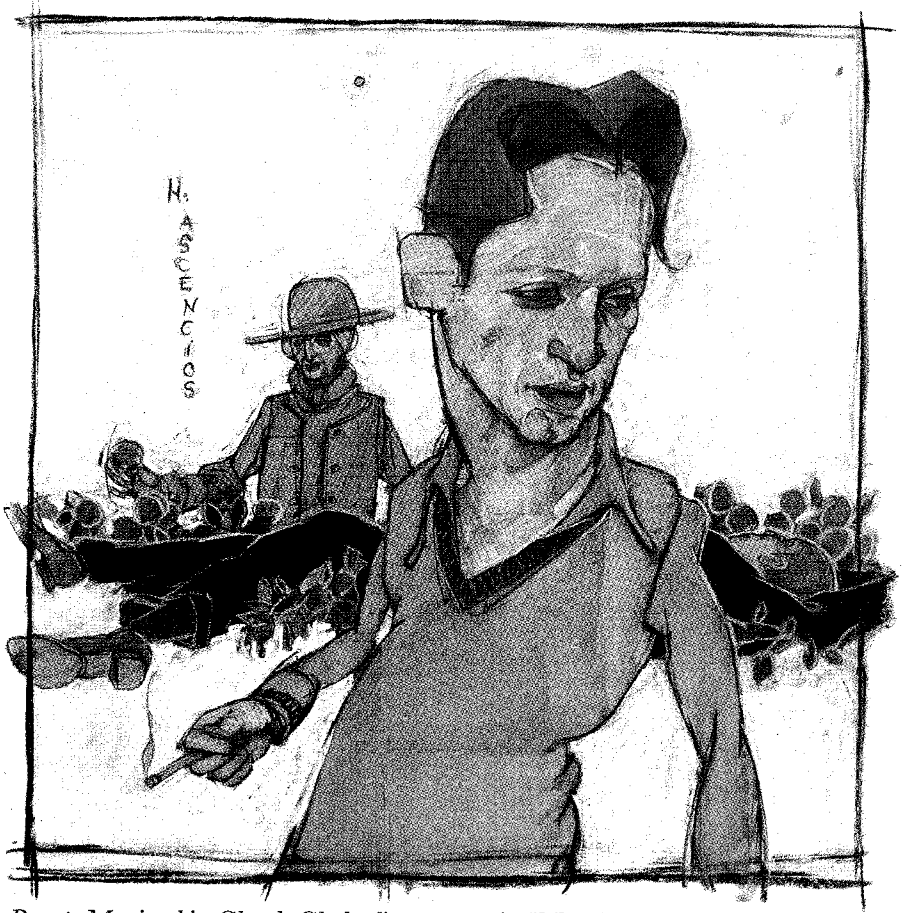
in front of the woman's little girl, and the child doesn't react. Tarantino wants the shock of a mother killed in front of her daughter without the audience undergoing any discomfort at all. The movie is what's formally known as decadence and commonly known as crap. Saying that it's an homage to long-established genres in Hong Kong doesn't reduce its pop-nihilistic stupidity. Some of the sequences have a scintillating visual flair, but you come out feeling nothing at all. And this is only the first half.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)



Benoît Magimel in Claude Chabrol's new movie, "The Flower of Evil."

N. ASCENCIOS

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Nothing much happens in the new film by the writer-director Sofia Coppola, but she has first-rate abilities as an observer and as a rueful comedian, and much of the movie is sweetly funny and satisfying. In Tokyo, a burned-out American movie star named Bob Harris (Bill Murray) shows up to appear in a whiskey ad. Stranded in a sleekly pompous modern hotel, he can't connect with anything or even sleep, but he does hook up (chastely) with a very young woman, Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), whose fashion-photographer husband (Giovanni Ribisi) is rapidly slipping away from her. Both Bob and Charlotte are in emotional limbo, and they become an odd, inappropriate couple. Murray has never been this quiet, this wary, this subtly acid before—or this warm, either. The drama of the movie, such as it is, lies in seeing just how much he will respond and when.—*D.D.* (9/15/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

MYSTIC RIVER

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neighborhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Kevin Bacon tightens his facial muscles into a mask; Tim Robbins looks puffy and frightened; and Sean Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen. With Marcia Gay Harden and Laura Linney, both in devastating form.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

SCHOOL OF ROCK

Fans of Jack Black: your cup runneth over. He plays Dewey Finn, a mediocre but enthusiastic guitarist who bluffs his way into a substitute-teaching position at an exclusive private elementary school. At first the job is purgatory, but then it's paradise: some of the fifth graders turn out to be skilled classical musicians, and soon Black begins instructing them in the finer points of power chords. The movie nostalgically celebrates the liberating power of classic rock—the way it could impart coolness to all true believers. The kids top the charts in adorableness, and their acting, for better or worse, belongs to the amateurish tradition of "The Bad News Bears." Mike White's somewhat (for him) generic

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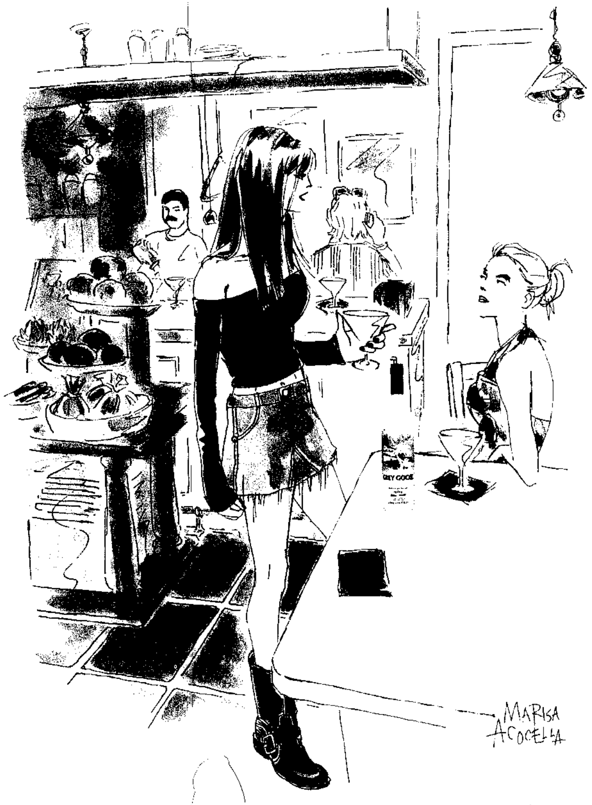
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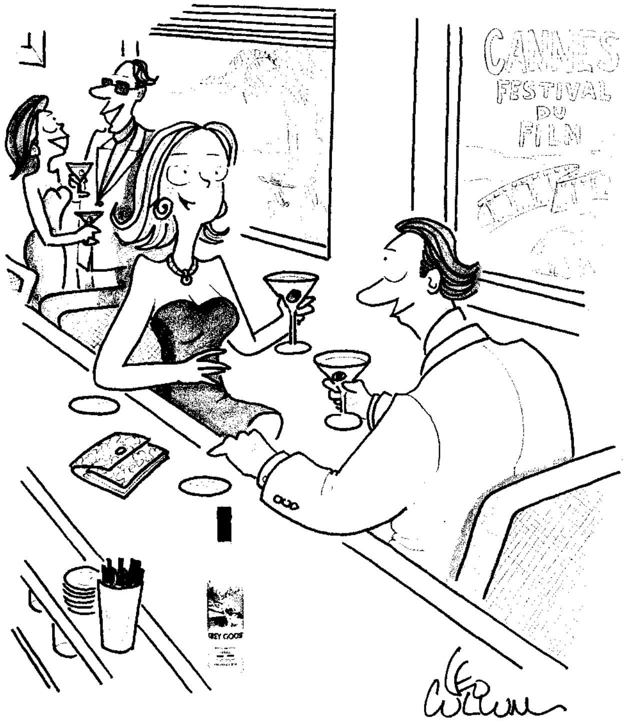
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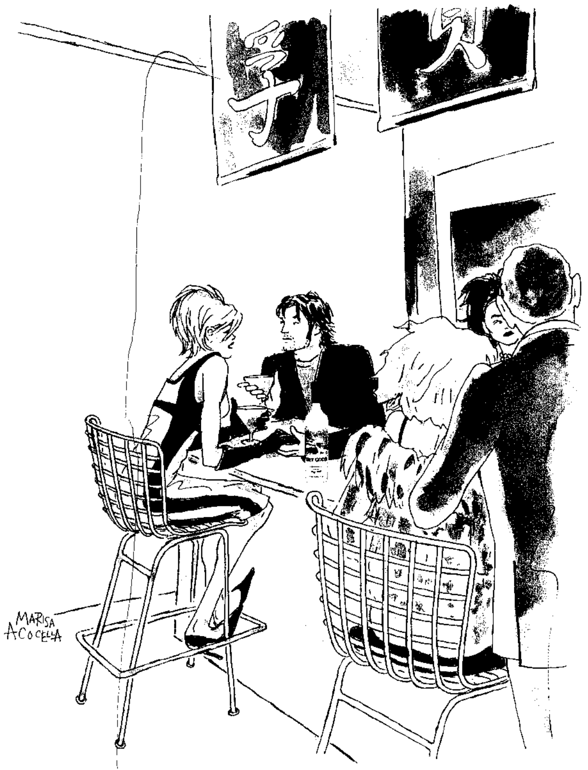
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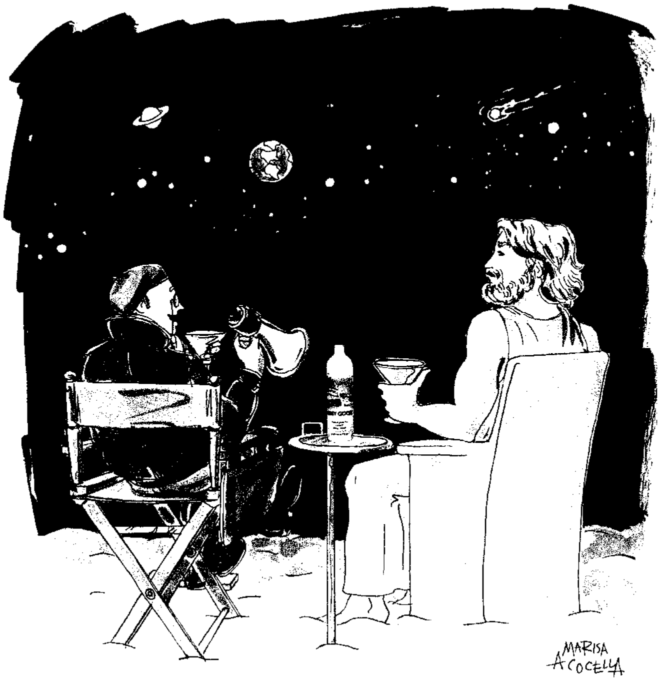
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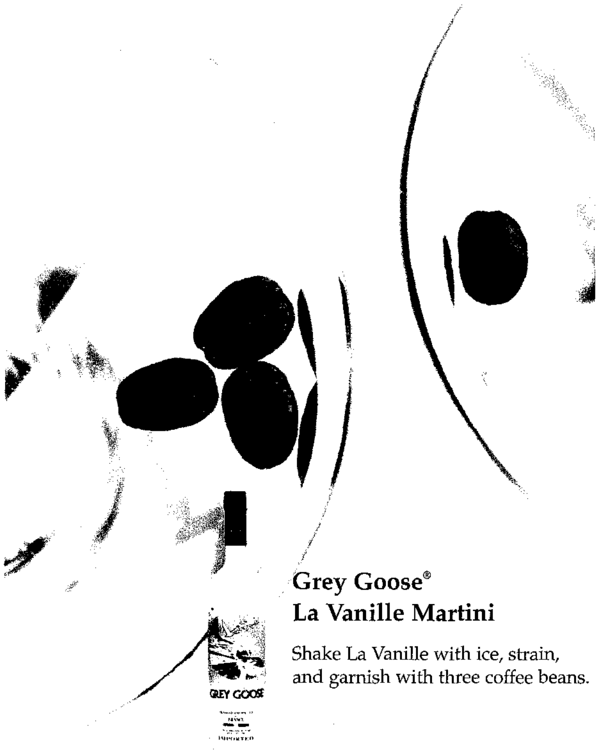

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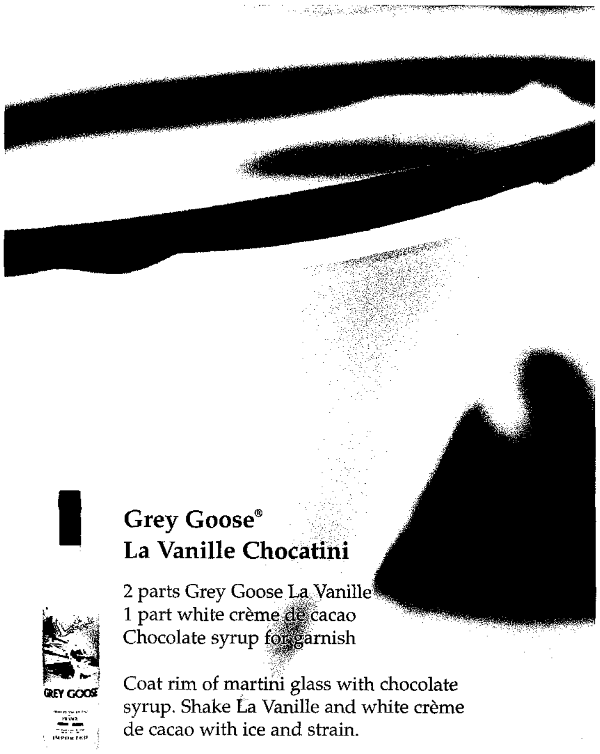

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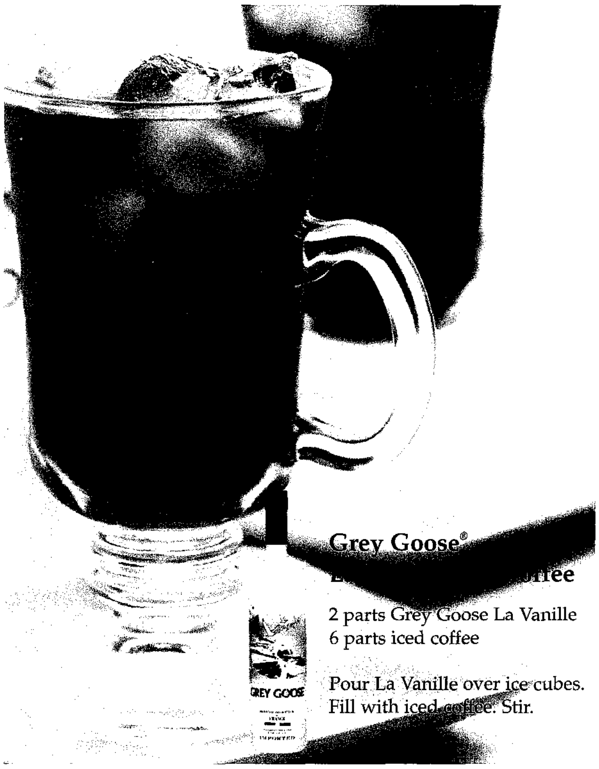

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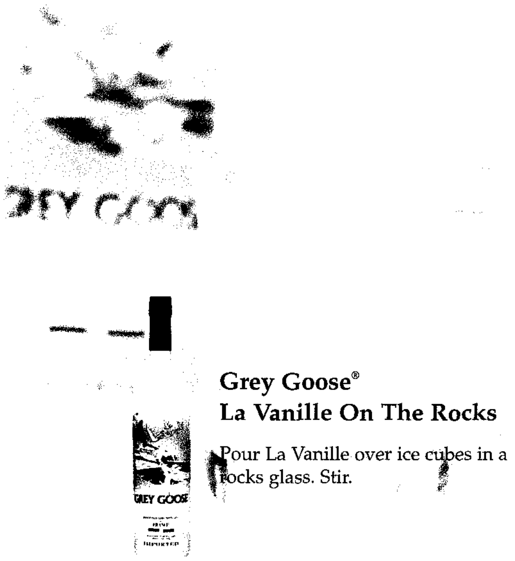

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THE DVD PAGE

A Few Good Disks

The DVD may be the swiftest success in consumer-electronics history. And it has also become the movie buff's format of choice, thanks to pioneering companies like the Criterion Collection, which has won widespread fan support for its deluxe archival DVD releases. They overflow with production stills, pages of scripts or source material, and interviews with filmmakers and film scholars.

That approach works superbly for canonical European and Asian directors such as Bergman, Cocteau, Dreyer, Kurosawa, and Fellini. It also brings terrific zing to a pop classic like Stanley Kubrick's "Spartacus." In one of the most enlightening and amusing audio tracks ever assembled, Kirk Douglas and others hold forth on the movie's drive and imagery—and Howard Fast, on whose novel the movie is based, jumps in at choice moments to growl out a barbed, witty counterpoint. To Douglas, having Spartacus in his slave days bite the ankle of a Roman guard defines his scrappy hero; to Fast, "it defines Hollywood."

TOM BACHTELL

Recently, Criterion boxed five disks of vintage Alfred Hitchcock under the title "Wronged Men & Notorious Women." The pièce de résistance is "Notorious," in which a U.S. agent after the Second World War (Cary Grant) falls in love with an imprisoned Nazi's loose daughter (Ingrid Bergman) yet still enlists her to woo—and even wed—a Rio-based Nazi (Claude Rains) who's busy laying plans for a Fourth Reich. The additional material, such as the 1948 Lux Radio Theatre adaptation, in which Joseph Cotten voices Grant's role, adds to the dark, sexy intrigue.

Hitchcock, alas, never recorded that DVD mainstay, a director's running commentary, and most breathing directors don't have Hitchcock's ability to elucidate their craft; many end up talking about the weather or the catering wagon. The director Curtis Hanson chooses not to record DVD commentary, wary that it may destroy the open-endedness of movie art and the mystery of movie magic. But he doesn't leave admirers empty-handed. The "L.A. Confidential" DVD (Warner) includes the illustrated social history of postwar Los Angeles that served as his pitch for the movie, the "Wonder Boys" disk (Paramount) supplements the film's picaresque literary comedy with a tour of Pittsburgh, and "8 Mile" (Universal) has a revealing featurette about the film's richest scene, its climactic freestyle rap battle royale.

It's another Universal release, however, that is making the biggest splash in the rap world right now: the twentieth-anniversary edition of Brian De Palma's over-the-top gangster extravaganza "Scarface," which comes as a two-disk set that includes a documentary about the movie's influence on hip-hop personalities who view Al Pacino's Tony Montana as a street hero. The funniest bit, though, is a comparison of selected movie scenes featuring the notoriously profane characters and their bowdlerized network-TV versions. Sample euphemism: "Where'd you get that beauty scar, tough guy—eating pineapple?"

Last year, Peter Jackson took the DVD form to dizzying aesthetic (and commercial) heights with his four-disk "special extended" edition of "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" (New Line Home Video). He skillfully integrated a half hour of new footage into his theatrical-release cut, enhancing its characterizations, scope, and themes. Just as impressive are Pixar releases like the two-disk "Monsters, Inc.," which provides a virtual crash course in computer animation. The Pixar guru John Lasseter introduces the two-disk Disney presentation of Hayao Miyazaki's traditionally animated "Spirited Away," the tale of a mopey ten-year-old girl navigating an alternate universe full of astonishing spirits. It became Japan's box-office champ and is destined to join "E.T." and "The Wizard of Oz" in the top ranks of movie fairy tales and fables.

With Halloween approaching, sci-fi, fantasy, and horror fans should check out the catalogue of Kino, a company that rivals the Criterion Collection for audacity and quality. Kino's disks of "The Nibelungen Saga" and "Metropolis" do justice to Fritz Lang, the Peter Jackson of the silent German cinema. Equally spectacular is their recent release of "The Man Who Laughs," a 1928 masterpiece from the lesser-known German director Paul Leni. This exquisite example of gothic-romantic horror derives its timeless allure from Conrad Veidt's characterization of a man with a smile carved into his face as a punishment. One look at Veidt's visage confirms what Bob Kane, the creator of Batman, always contended: that he based the Joker on this woeful laughing man.

—*Michael Sragow*

script sets the stage for Black to cut loose. The actor has a knack for moving his body in funny ways, and he sings and prances for the camera in a risky and aerobic performance. Joan Cusack offers fine support as the tightly wound principal. Richard Linklater directed, with his trademark touch of conveying milieu.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE STATION AGENT

The writer and director Tom McCarthy has turned his attention to a New Jersey backwater and come up with something lyrical, taciturn, and stripped of sentimentality. Peter Dinklage plays Fin, a dwarf who inherits a cabinlike home beside a railroad track in Morris County, Newfoundland. Fin loves trains and not much else—hardly surprising, given that the world has shown him little more than a laugh and a sneer—and he is none too thrilled when his quiet space is invaded. Over time, though, he warms to the invaders: Joe (Bobby Cannavale), loud and lonely, who sells coffee and hot dogs from a neighboring van, and Olivia (Patricia Clarkson), a painter, still mourning the loss of a young son. The three of them fall in with one another, then fall out, then gradually fall back in; like some of the best short stories, the picture evades grandeur, mature enough to linger on what nearly happens. None of the central performers put a foot wrong, and McCarthy takes care not to insist that small is beautiful; rather, he and Dinklage leave us reflecting that small can be angry, tired, and tough.—*A.L.* (10/6/03) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TO BE AND TO HAVE

Lean, quick, and devastatingly adroit at the age of fifty-five, the teacher Georges Lopez presides over a one-room schoolhouse in this marvellous documentary shot in the Auvergne region of France. Monsieur Lopez divides the children, ages three to eleven, into three groups, and enforces strict discipline. No one could call his methods progressive; no one could call them ineffective, either. Watching the intensity of his work from moment to moment, child by child, is a demonstration of craft exercised on a level at which skill and love have become indistinguishable. The filmmaker Nicolas Philibert brings the same kind of dedication to his own work. The children are great, unwary camera subjects, and Philibert gives us beautifully composed views of them, granting us enough time to observe each child closely, imagine his circumstances, and see what he does or doesn't learn. The documentary is a deeply satisfying aesthetic and pedagogic experience, though Americans may wonder how such terrific children can become such irritating adults. In French.—*D.D.* (9/29/03) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TOKYO STORY

Provincial parents (Chishu Ryu and Chieko Higashiyama) hang on to traditional notions of family while their married children (So Yamamura and Haruko Sugimura) hustle to maintain toeholds in postwar Tokyo. When the parents are stranded there one afternoon without their citified son and daughter, Ryu quips that they're "homeless." The director, Yasujiro Ozu, turns the problem of what to do on family visits—the subject of many a sitcom episode—into a tragic domestic poem. His emotion-charged formalism brings out the beauty in the parents' stoicism and amplifies the surprises that crop up in the archetypal characters, like the despair that emerges from beneath the smile of the couple's loving, widowed daughter-in-law (Setsuko Hara). This director is resolutely unsentimental—he earns every falling tear. Originally released in 1953. In Japanese.—*M.S.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 16-17.)

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

A soft-core renovation fantasy for educated women. Frances (Diane Lane), a San Francisco writer and teacher dumped by her adulterous husband, goes on a bus tour of Tuscany and falls in love with a crumbling old villa. After many blissfully undramatic episodes—an ancient wall falls down, a toilet mysteriously emits boiling water—the house gets scraped, plastered, painted, and gardened back into shape. It's Frances's life, of course, that really needs work. Luckily, in Rome, she finds Marcello (Raoul Bova)—yard-wide shoulders, blue eyes, all of Italian manhood in a white suit—and drives off with him in his Alfa Romeo convertible. There's a lot more of this sort of harmless, pleasant, inconsequential stuff, with much of it redeemed by the good humor of the writer-director Audrey Wells, who serves up clichés and makes fun of them at the same time. With Sandra Oh as a sharp-tongued Bay Area lesbian friend of Frances's who arrives in Tuscany to have a baby.—*D.D.* (9/29/03) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

WONDERLAND

This is not the story of John Holmes, the pasha of porno, who bestrode the world of the skin flick with an ease and authority that made life pretty interesting for anybody lying underneath. Instead, it is the story of what Holmes did next—his greasy twilight, in the early nineteen-eighties, when his demeanor and daily routine became no more savory than that of any other cokehead. He was mixed up in a multiple murder, the savagery of which is pressed upon us, and the moral consequence of which appears to be "Stick to blue movies and stay off drugs." Why the director, James Cox, should expect us to leap on this sorry saga with enthusiasm is a mystery; indeed, as if worried by the grind of his narrative, he tries over and over to chop and chivvy it into a state of high excitement. Holmes is played by Val Kilmer, so thoroughly spaced out that he could slip without noticing into another movie, or, for that matter, another galaxy.—*A.L.* (10/6/03) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

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THE FLOWER OF EVIL
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

OUT OF TIME
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Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
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42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
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Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
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19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
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Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Cinema India." Oct. 17 at 7:30: "A Tale of a Naughty Girl" (2001, Buddhadeb Dasgupta; in Hindi and Bengali). ♦ Oct. 18-19: A Bela Lugosi weekend. Oct. 18 at 2: "Dracula" (1931, Tod Browning). ♦ Oct. 18 at 3:30: "The White Zombie" (1932, Victor Halperin). ♦ Oct. 19 at 2: "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1932, Robert Florey). ♦ Oct. 19 at 3:30: "Glen or Glenda" (†). ♦ Repertory nights. Oct. 18-19 at 6:30: "Once Upon a Time in America" (1984, Sergio Leone).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Oct. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Seres Humanos" (2003, Jorge Aguilera; in Spanish). ♦ Through Oct. 28: "I Don't Know What I Am Doing," films by and about Andy Warhol. Oct. 16 at 7:30: "Screen Test #2" (1965) and "The Life of Juanita Castro" (1966). ♦ Oct. 17 at 7:30: "The Velvet Underground and Nico" (1966) and "Hedy" (1966). ♦ Oct. 18 at 3, 6, and 9:10: "Pie in the Sky: The Brigid Berlin Story" (2000, Shelly Dunn Fremont and Vincent Fremont). ♦ Oct. 19 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Absolut Warhola" (2001, Stanislaw Mucha). ♦ Oct. 21 at 7:30: "Mrs. Warhol" (1966) and "Ari and Mario" (1966). ♦ Howard Hawks films. Oct. 20 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Only Angels Have Wings" (1939).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Two films by Chris Marker. Oct. 15-16 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "La Jetée" (1962; in French) and "Sans Soleil" (1982; in French). ♦ Oct. 17-21 at 1:20, 3:20, 5:20, 7:20, and 9:20: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French).

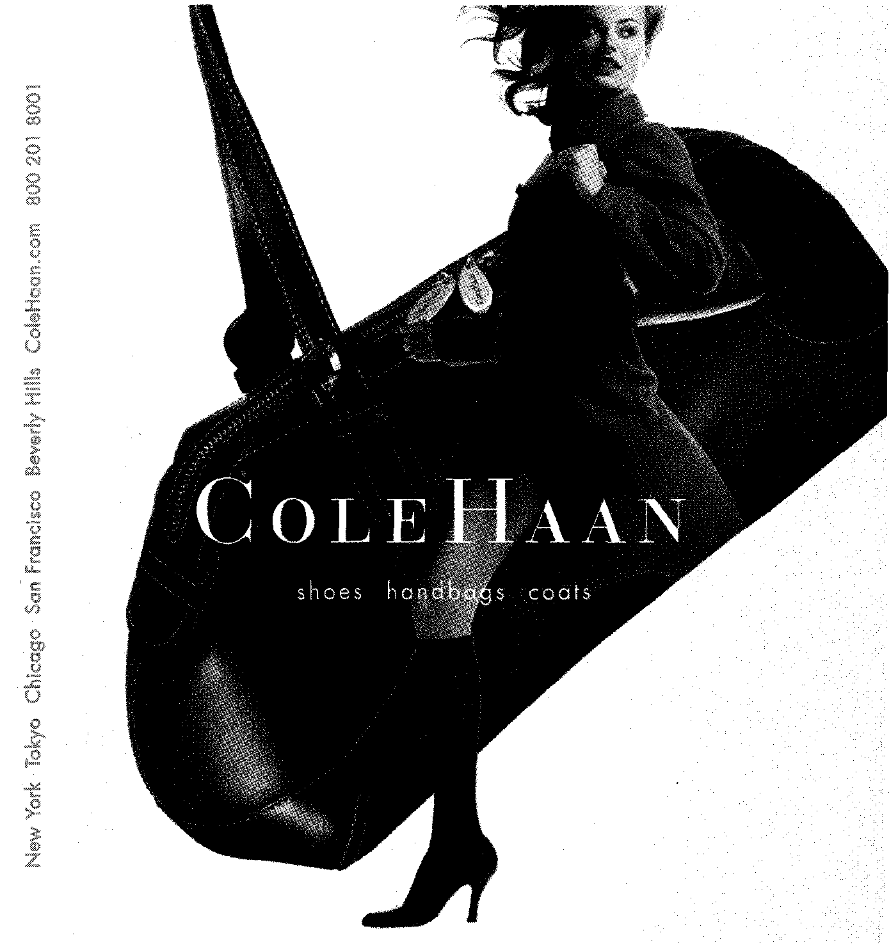
FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Nov. 4: The films of Isabelle Huppert. Oct. 21 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Piano Teacher" (2001, Michael Haneke; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Oct. 23: A retrospective of Germaine Dulac, a nineteen-twenties avant-garde director. All films are in French. Oct. 16 at 6 and Oct. 19 at 4: "Death of the Sun" (1921). ♦ Oct. 16 at 8 and Oct. 19 at 4: "Soul of an Artist" (1925). ♦ Oct. 17 and Oct. 20 at 6: "L'Invitation au Voyage" (1927). ♦ Oct. 18 at 4: "The Beautiful Woman Without Mercy" (1920). Oct. 18 at 6: "The Seashell and the Clergyman" (1927). ♦ In memory of Katharine Hepburn. Oct. 19 at 2: "A Bill of Divorcement" (†).

THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL
Lincoln Center (212-875-5050)—Through Oct. 19: The forty-first year for the festival; most screenings take place at Alice Tully Hall. Oct. 15 at 6: "Goodbye Dragon Inn" (2003, Tsai Ming-liang; in Taiwanese). ♦ Oct. 15 at 9 and Oct. 16 at 6: "Distant" (2003, Nuri Bilge Ceylan; in Turkish). ♦ Oct. 16 at 9:15 and Oct. 18 at 3:30: "PTU" (2003, Johnnie To; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 17 at 6 and Oct. 18 at 9:30: "Raja" (2003, Jacques Doillon; in French). ♦ Oct. 17 at 9:15 and Oct. 18 at noon: "The Barbarian Invasions" (2003, Denys Arcand; in French). ♦ Oct. 18 at 6:30: "Mayor of the Sunset Strip" (2003, George Hickenlooper). ♦ Oct. 19 at 8:30: "21 Grams" (2003, Alejandro González Iñárritu).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Oct. 17-18: "Big Wednesday" (1978, John Milius).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Nov. 5: "Yasujiro Ozu: A Centennial Celebration." All films are in Japanese. Oct. 15 at 4 and 8:45: "The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice" (1952). ♦ Oct. 15 at 6:15: "Early Summer" (1951). ♦ Oct. 16 at 2 and Oct. 17 at 1 and 6:30: "Tokyo Story" (†). ♦ Oct. 16 at 4:35 and Oct. 17 at 3:45 and 9:15: "Early Spring" (1956).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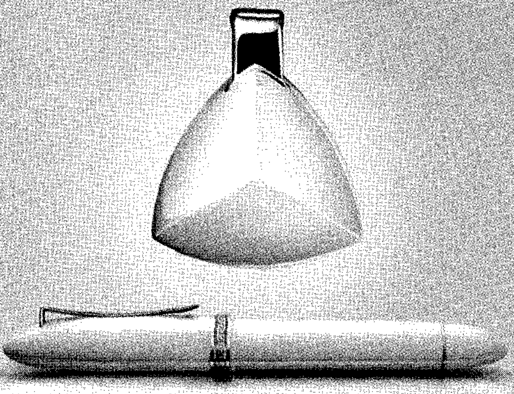
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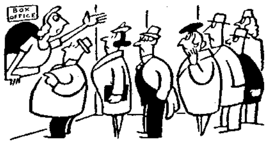
THE NEW YORKER

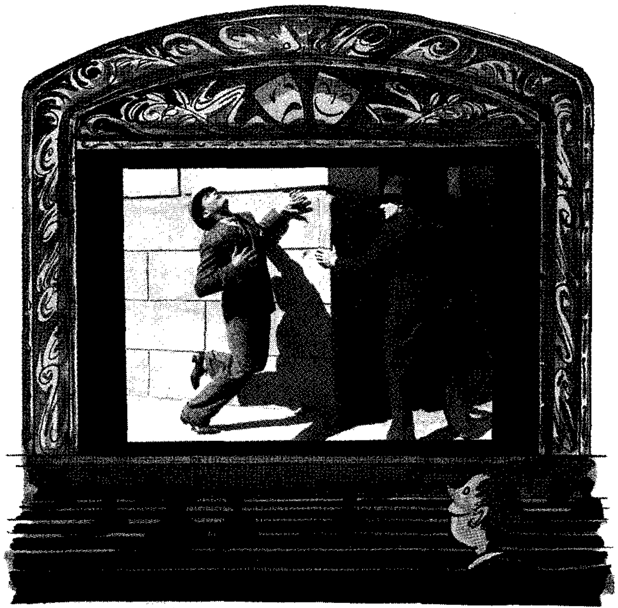
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MOVIE STRUCK



Tracking shot, please, of a twelve-year-old boy running north on Lexington Avenue as a 1933 twilight begins to fall. He is sprinting for home, on Ninety-third Street, and guilt makes him fly. He must be there in time to get a little homework under his belt before his old man arrives from the office, and in time to assume the bored, everyday look of a kid just back from his school's afternoon rec program, instead of from "King Kong" at the RKO 86th Street, where he has really been. Panting, he lets himself in the front door, checks out the mail for a *Popular Mechanics*, checks out the dog, grabs a banana, falls on his bed, opens a math book, and gives himself over to thoughts of Robert Armstrong, Bruce Cabot, Fay Wray (Fay Wray!), jungle drums, aerial machine-gun fire, and the remembered velvety dark of a movie theatre in the afternoon. The thought *Lucky again* crosses his mind, and in time he may actually find a pencil and begin to write down fractions. The boy (he is me) went on being lucky. No one at home or at school ever twigged to his stolen movie afternoons, and for the rest of that school year, as in the year before, he made it down to the Eighty-sixth Street casbah a couple of times a week, where there were five theatres to choose from, each offering a double feature to deepen his budget of guilt and joy, make critical inroads on his allowance, and hook him, once and for good, on the movies. What I saw on those stolen afternoons (and, on the up and up, sometimes on weekends) was a cross-section of early-thirties Hollywood, which was just then coming into high gear. Paul Muni's "Scarface" and "I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang" slip into view, as do Cecil B. De Mille's "The Sign of the Cross" (with Claudette Colbert as a Roman temptress bathing in ass's milk), the Barrymores in "Rasputin and the Empress," Dick Powell in one of the Busby Berkeley musicals, the Marx Brothers (with the dopey Zeppo singing "Everyone Says I Love You" to Thelma Todd), the vine-borne Johnny Weissmuller, Jimmy Cagney shot dead in his pin-striped suit in "The Public Enemy," and Laurel and Hardy forced to share their bed with a chimp and a flea circus. One afternoon, I found myself alone in the dark with Bela Lugosi's pallid, orally fixated Count Dracula and realizing, even as I stared, that I wouldn't be able to call out for help that night, when he returned, in his cape and slippery hair, to break in on my sleep.

Quality was not much of a factor in my afternoon choices, but I had already noticed that although the flicks were clearly wasting my mind, as my father would have put it, they were richly nutritious to some other side of me. One bathed in this scummy Ganges and arose refreshed, with surprising memories. Most of my friends still go to the movies, but not many of them are moviegoers in this sense, and while I sometimes wonder at the prodigious thousands of hours I have spent in the popcorned dark, there is an avid, darting kind of selection one learns there—a process at once ironic and romantic which plucks up scenes and faces, attitudes and moments to save from the rush of



ILLUSTRATIONS BY GERALD SCARFE; PHOTOGRAPH: EVERETT COLLECTION

events—that felt like a saving knack for those times and times since.

When I moved along to high school and then college, I found movie-permeated friends waiting for me. Big-screen lines and scenes filled our talk and if somebody unexpectedly held up an invisible lorgnette, like the dandified eighteenth-century spy Leslie Howard, and began, "They seek him here, they seek him there / Those Frenchies seek him everywhere. / Is he in Heaven," the rest of us in the room would join in: "Is he in"—*lorgnette points downward*—"That *demned* elusive Pimpernel?" I graduated and went into the Air Force and eventually off to the Pacific. At Hickam Field, in Hawaii, we'd check out the post theatre in the evening and, if we didn't like what was on, slip through a hole in the fence into adjoining Pearl Harbor and walk to the sector of docks where five or six destroyer escorts were tied up side by side. (The Navy always had the latest releases, for some reason.) Sailors on board would tip us about which ship had the best feature that night, and we'd step over—saluting the con as we came aboard—and settle down with the crew on the fantail, just in time for the Mickey. One night, late in 1944, while I lay under the stars and watched Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth dancing to Jerome Kern tunes in "Cover Girl," it came to me that this war might end someday, and there would be more life and movies to come.

I began sneaking off to movies just when the successive earthquakes of the Depression and the Second World War were coming along, and there was a yearning for a broader and more sophisticated set of attitudes in this country. The movies did it for us; they were just the ticket. The great cresting tide of late-thirties and early-forties Hollywood—an Augustan era, when the studios were cranking out five hundred films each year—swept over us and changed us forever: Astaire and Rogers, Bogart, Judy Garland, Olivier, Cary Grant (wrestling with Irene Dunne's fox terrier, which has his—well, *not* his, it turns out—derby in its mouth); Gable and Tracy; the Joads and Rupert of Hentzau and Aunt Pittypat; Miss Froy's name drawn on the fogged train window, and David Niven in his Spad, wiping a spray of engine oil from his aviator goggles. Grant and Hepburn step into a waltz as the old year dies, von Stroheim snips his geranium, and spoiled heiress Bette Davis has this brain tumor that brings a brief, strange happiness with her doctor husband George Brent.

Anyone who was the wrong age or in the wrong place for this stuff—my parents and my children, for instance, and even those who picked it up later from videos and American-studies classes—never quite caught up. We were the lucky ones, we first citizens of film. We sat down in our Loew's or Bijou or Pantages as strangers to each other but together absorbed fresh gestures, new tones of voice, and different tones of mind and style, as taught by the dashing, elegant, or stricken figures up on the screen: the same wished-for, uniting experience that sends us out to the movies today but too often in vain. I still go to the movies, and one of the overcrowded plexes I frequent—with their squalid queues and deafening trailers—is the same Orpheum, sans stage and soaring balconies, that I used to emerge from, guilty and entranced, into the speckled shade of the Third Avenue El.

—Roger Angell

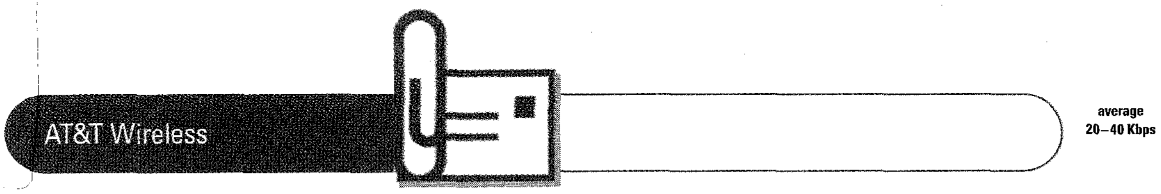
IN THE WINGS

POLL STARS

In his 1994 film "True Lies," Arnold Schwarzenegger played an agent so secret that even his wife was kept in the dark. She saw him as a drudge in a raincoat, unaware that he was summoned to save the nation on a weekly basis. How times change. At the start of this summer, Arnold was looking forward to nothing more arduous than the promotion of "Terminator 3." Little did he suspect that plans were afoot for his new career—a career so secret that he himself knew nothing about it. Only his wife, code-named "Maria," was in on the plot. How else can one account for the look of bewilderment that gripped Schwarzenegger, the newly elected governor of California, on October 7th, causing his tan features, barely mobile at the best of times, to freeze into a rictus of hilarity? He could cope with no longer being an Austrian. He had recovered from the passing of his bodybuilder's crown to other men molded from cuts of glazed ham. As for his achievements as an actor, those, too, tragically, would pass. In his victor's eyes, however, you saw the dawning horror: Oh Gott. I'm in *pollydigs*.

Schwarzenegger, who had previously campaigned for nothing more controversial than fitness for all, ran as a Republican, although, given his position on gay marriage and gun control, he would not be recognized as such by the more barnacled veterans of the G.O.P. To confuse the issue, he accepted the governorship while standing on a Democratic platform—that is to say, a platform filled with Democrats. "As a matter of fact, all the people behind me are the Shrivers," he told the crowd, sounding less like a man who is milking his connection to J.F.K. and more like a man who has married into the Munsters. This Arnoldian fondness for the bipartisan means reaching out to the California legislatures—"I extend my hand to them," he said, as if giving a master class in the role of Frankenstein's monster—and the state is itching to discover whether Schwarzenegger will make good on his warmest election promise. Everybody in the state, he had announced back on August 7th, would, under his governance, have "a fantastic job." Lavatory cleaners of Los Angeles! Could you test-drive Ferraris for a living? And *you* there, with no health insurance, mending that road: didn't you know that the taste controllers at Michelob are hiring now?

Fantastic or otherwise, the coming year crackles with interest, and there would be little surprise if other monarchs of the movie industry, emboldened by the California recall, were to make the principled leap from screen to stump. The distance between the two is shrinking by the day; modern voters, given a choice between quiet political certitude and the cacophony of fame, are not hard to sway, and we have long since passed the era in which pensive, halting figures such as Warren Beatty flirted with civic duty and then pulled back. Celebrity now comes equipped with an inbuilt aggression that makes



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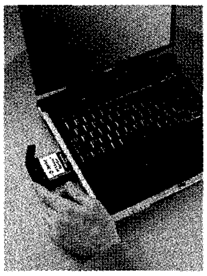

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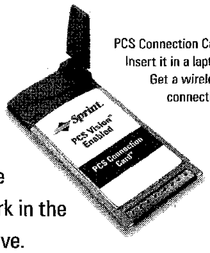

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it ideal for the purposes of electioneering, and before which more traditional qualifications must learn to tremble. To put the matter at its bluntest: what has Wesley Clark got that Angelina Jolie hasn't?

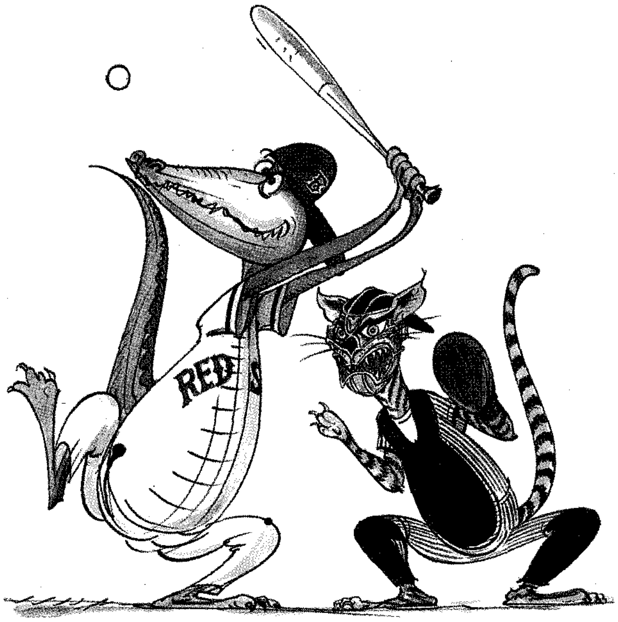
One can readily name several things that Ms. Jolie does possess, and that her opponent sorely lacks. For example, nobody could go to sleep using the General's lips as a pillow, and, in the unlikely event that he chose to carry a firearm on the campaign trail, his doctors would surely forbid him to strap it against his thigh. Supporters of the Clark campaign point out that he helped to stabilize Kosovo, whereas senior figures in the Jolie camp claim, with some justification, that a public unable to locate Kosovo on a map may prefer to place their trust, fiscal as well as military, in a strong woman who raids tombs.

As an actor turned public servant, Schwarzenegger may be the latest in a proud line that stretches back through Ronald Reagan and Shirley Temple, but the new governor is not in his first youth. Power in Hollywood rests in increasingly younger or more delicate hands. Reese Witherspoon is, if anything, ridiculously overqualified to run the country, to judge by "Election" and "Legally Blonde," and, in the churning wake of "Pirates of the Caribbean," is there any reason for independent voters, disgruntled by their options for 2004, not to approach Johnny Depp while he still has his mascara on? Now, there is a fellow who would soothe international discord; just imagine the G8 summit unwinding in a sweet haze of ponytailed bonhomie. The most efficient plan, perhaps, would be to index-link political nominations directly to box-office performance, so that the stars of the moment could be required to assume civic office and then, as their popularity fades, be recalled without any of the fuss that attended the unfortunate Gray Davis. In short, the major parties should not commit to their candidates for the next Presidency until this year's Christmas movies are released. Where Terminators tread, can hobbits be far behind?

—*Anthony Lane*

PLAY BALL
BLEACHER CREATURES

In Boston last week, after the Red Sox knocked off the A's, chaos reigned briefly outside Fenway Park. The home team was away, in Oakland, but on Ipswich and Lansdowne and Boylston Streets beer bottles flew, cars were overturned, and breasts were bared. Several long-deprived Soxfans—"knuckleheads," according to Boston's mayor, Thomas Menino—broke into the empty park for a victory lap around the bases.



Not long before, another repressed knucklehead (or knuckle-dragger, at least) had broken *out* of his park, the Franklin Park Zoo, in nearby Dorchester. Eleven-year-old Little Joe, a three-hundred-pound gorilla, set off on a city stroll—his second in as many months—spiking a two-year-old girl along the way. His jaunt, in the spirit of the hopefulness that very occasionally comes over the cynical citizens of Red Sox Nation, ended after two hours, when he was finally subdued, near a ballfield, by half a dozen tranquillizer darts.

Here in New York, the Yankees' defeat of the Twins passed more or less without fanfare; expectation begets entitlement. The animal news, though, was big stuff. A man named Antoine Yates was attacked by Ming, a Bengal tiger that had been living in his apartment, across the Harlem River from Yankee Stadium. Yates, who usually fed Ming raw chickens, had tried to prevent the tiger from dining on Shadow, his house cat; Ming's apparent conviction that everything in the apartment was his to eat seemed, on the eve of the big Yanks-Sox showdown, to reflect Yankee fans' boundless presumptions. Ming required just two tranquillizer darts, and police, once inside the apartment, also discovered Al, a five-foot alligator (some papers called him a caiman). Shadow was nowhere to be found. By the series opener, on Wednesday, it was not clear whether the gator or the tiger was to blame.

Amid such circumstances, the man to consult was clearly Mike Gimbel, of the city's Bureau of Water and Sewer Operations. Gimbel happens to be one of those rare experts in both baseball and exotic-urban-pet keeping. In the late nineties, he served as the Red Sox' "statistical consultant"; he was a predecessor of the team's current adviser, Bill James. Gimbel liked to refer to himself as the club's "secret weapon," and was, in a sense, one of the architects of Boston's most recent playoff team, which lost to the Yankees, in five games, in 1999. Gimbel, like Yates (but not like James), kept an apartment full of wild beasts. Some years ago, his Williamsburg loft was raided by police, who discovered Panama, Sal, Nicki, Buena, Rio, and Louie—all caimans—roaming the place, along with an iguana and five turtles.

"You name it, I caught it and tried to keep it as a pet," Gimbel said last week, before Game One. "I'm drawn to the reptiles, but I've had everything." He would not, for instance, recommend keeping a cat as big as Ming. "A four-hundred-and-twenty-five-pounder goes to scratch you, your head can roll across the room," he said. Same goes for a gorilla. "Even a small monkey is something that you really cannot have," he said. "Because it's too intelligent, too active to put in a cage, like a prisoner. And if you have it out in the apartment it's going to destroy the place."

Anyway, Gimbel liked the chances of this year's Red Sox team, compared with the '99 squad, in large part because of its manager, Grady Little. "Nobody could be as bad as Jimy Williams," Gimbel said, referring to Little's predecessor. "With Jimy Williams, I was always just trying to figure out what in the world he was thinking."

So Williams was like a tiger—an inscrutable cat—whereas Little, it turns out, is relatively more caimanish. "I really like the caimans, because they let you know what they're thinking," Gimbel said. "Spectacled caimans, they give you about eight thousand warnings. Like this one summer, it was unbelievably hot, and we had no air-conditioning. So the only way me and my wife could cool off was to get in the pool with Panama. And that's his pool—that's the way he looks at it. We're in the pool trying to cool off, and he comes right up behind my wife and gives her the tiniest little nip on her butt and then runs away. He just wanted to say, 'Get out of my pool,' but he was very careful not to hurt her."

But (back to baseball) Gimbel could not be drawn into the perilous pool of Yanks-Sox predictions. "It's always a crapshoot," he said. "Each game is its own series, in a sense." Gimbel regards the hysterical reaction to Little Joe and Ming warily, the way he does the usual hunches and speculations that accompany a postseason series as emotional as Boston-New York. "I grew up essentially as a rebel, so I don't accept the normal interpretations of the world," he said. "Everybody has this wild view of alligators. That's Hollywood, not reality. Same thing with baseball. People mostly have no clue."

—*Ben McGrath*

ON THE AIR
SUPER, SUPER, SUPER!

Nine of David Frost's fellow-students at Cambridge went on to become Cabinet ministers, but Frost took a different path. Over breakfast last week at the Regency Hotel, the sixty-four-year-old British television personality recalled one of his early comedy routines: "It had an unctuous commentator trying to maintain the tone of a royal broadcast while commentating on the fact that the royal barge was, in fact, sinking." He cleared his throat: " 'And the Queen, smiling radiantly, is swimming for her life. Her Majesty is wearing a pale-blue taffeta dress, with matching lace . . .' " When Frost laughs, his long, fine eyelashes wipe the lenses of his glasses like scrubbers in a car wash.

By the age of twenty-three, Frost was the host of the popular satiric program "That Was the Week That Was." Soon he was hosting an American version of the show and then, in rapid succession, talk and variety shows on both sides of the Atlantic. He had a knack for the redundant, tripartite catchphrase: "Hello, good evening, and welcome!," "Marvellous, smashing, terrific!," and, of course, "Super, super, super!" Frost's bright, sedulous manner made his guests shine; when Richard Nixon decided, in 1977, to explain himself after his resignation, he selected Frost as his interlocutor. Nixon tried to break the ice before the taping by saying to Frost, "Did you do any fornicating this weekend?" For once, Frost was nearly dumbstruck.

Frost now embodies the establishment; he is, courtesy of the Queen whom he almost drowned in his imagination, Sir David Frost. Although his hair has thinned and his double-breasted blue suit protrudes at the waist, he remains springy and game. On Wednesday night, his newest show, a return to his roots in satire and sketch comedy called "The Strategic Humor Initiative," débuts on PBS. Frost will be based in a studio in London, and he will trade witty remarks, via satellite, with two younger co-hosts—Jimmy Tingle, in Boston, and Mary Walsh, in Toronto. ("Walsh, I am told, represents Canada's thriving satire industry," he said.) As he discussed the new show—amid lengthy digressions about the "smashing" interviews he had recently conducted with his good friends Vladimir Putin, Nelson Mandela, and Muhammad Ali—Frost spoke in a convivial purr that occasionally swelled to his clarion stage voice. "*It goes ponging into the ether*," he boomed, startling diners in distant corners of the restaurant, then murmured softly for a while before declaring, apropros of a balky coffeepot, "*Are you being frustrated by an irascible beaker?*"

When a waiter arrived, Frost looked up and said, " 'Ello, 'ello, 'ello. I'll have a little smoked salmon with poached eggs, but no—"

"No caviar?" The waiter looked distressed.

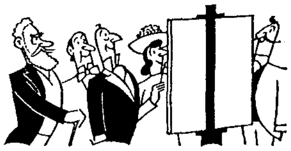
"Well, I'll have the caviar," Frost allowed, "but without the hollandaise sauce. *No sauce.*"

"The Strategic Humor Initiative," he went on to explain, will feature rising young comedians and a steady diet of anti-French jokes. "We'll keep returning to the other subjects we all have in common: Iraq, Tony Blair, the Royal Family," he said. "We all do share a common sense of humor; we just don't use the same words, sometimes. In Britain, 'homely' means cozy and welcoming. But take the line 'Oh, your wife is so homely'—you can't say that here in the States." He went on, "Our toilets are just marked boring old 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen,' while you have 'Guys' and 'Dolls,' or 'Dudes' and 'Dames.' When my secretary came here with me and went to the loo, she ran back after twenty seconds and said, 'Excuse me, David, am I a heifer or a steer?' "

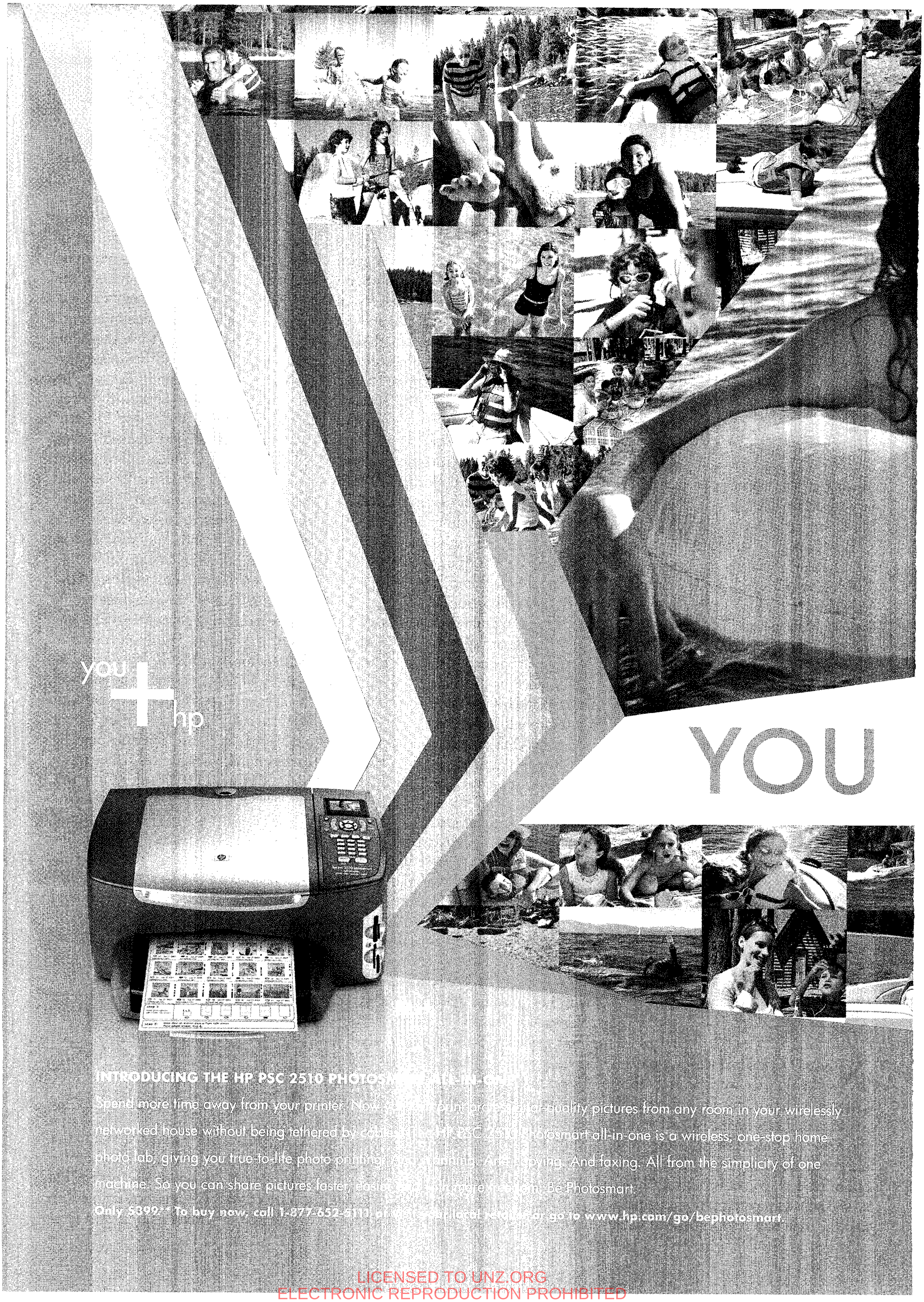
When Frost was reminded that ABC had once attempted to have three people anchor its evening newscast—Peter Jennings in London, Frank Reynolds in Washington, and Max Robinson in Chicago—and failed miserably, he laughed. "Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?" he said. "Eh? Eh? Title of a great old Methodist hymn." For a moment, he looked much younger; his father was a Methodist preacher. "Well, we'll watch out for that snare, and try to let each locale do its own natural material. But, if the J. Lo and Ben material is terrific one week, we might well say, '*Look, this J. Lo and Ben stuff is so hot, let's do it as a three-way!*' " Grinning boyishly, he seemed ready to go toe to toe with Toronto.

—*Tad Friend*

POSTSCRIPT
WILLIAM STEIG



William Steig, a contributor to this magazine since 1930, died the other day at the age of ninety-five, but contrived to leave a lasting impression of himself as a boy bursting with ideas



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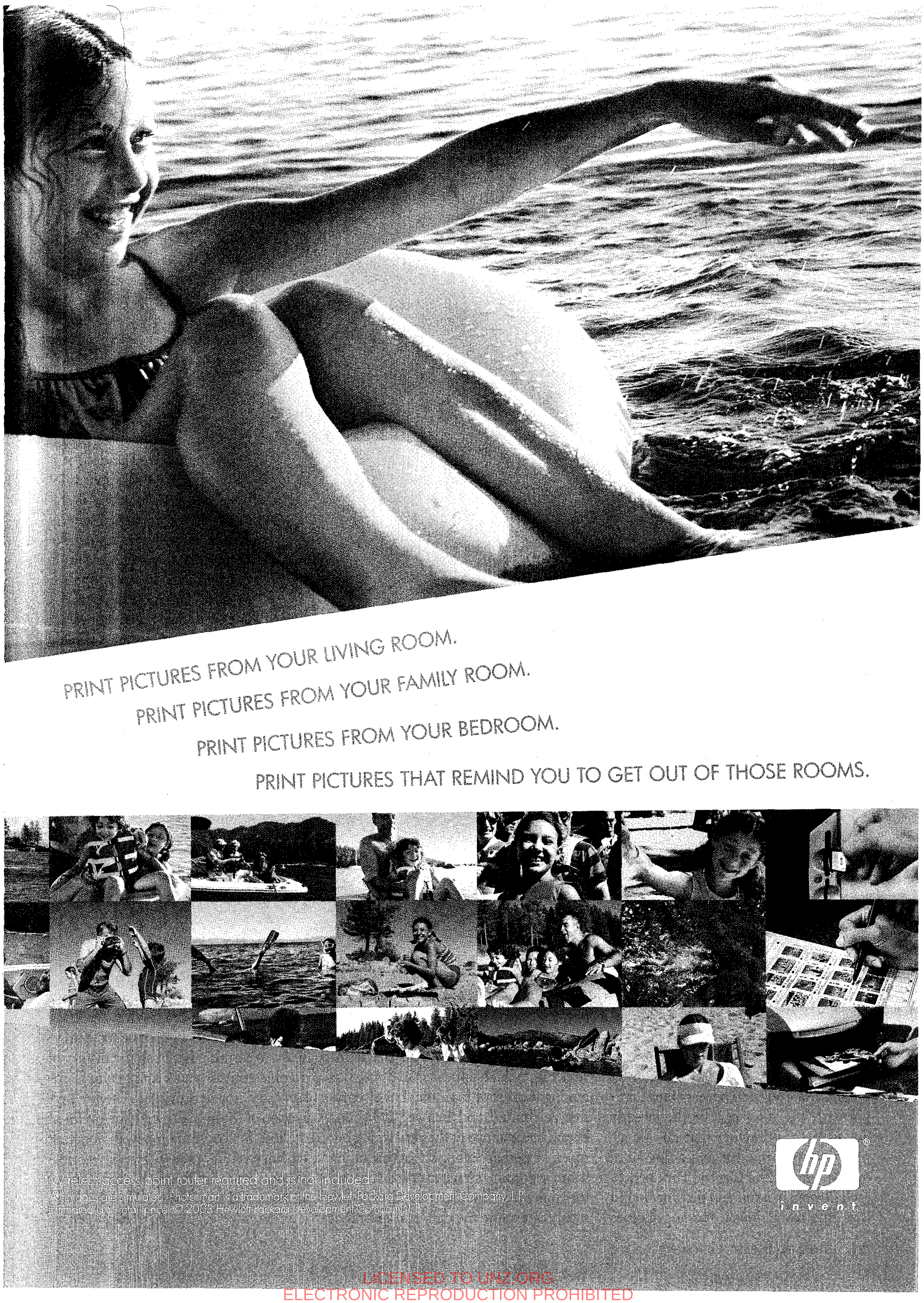

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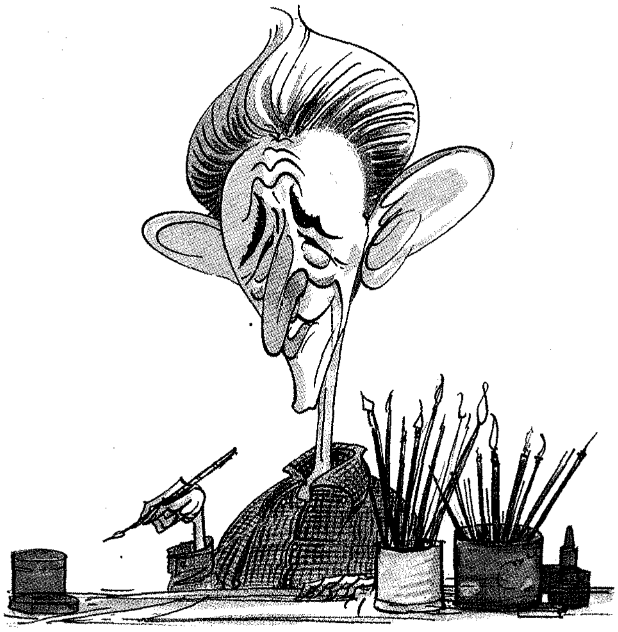
and promise. His first cartoons here called upon his beginnings in the Bronx—he was the son of socialist immigrants; his father was a housepainter—and found comedy in families living in cramped apartments with kids underfoot and a trickle of air or springtime coming in over the fire escape. "Come home early or I'll kick you in the pants," a large mom warns her small departing Boy Scout. The scenes were gentle, but adults often emerged as the heavies—"How's your fat little boyfriend?" a smirking grandpa asks an eight-year-old girl. Steig's first great successes in the magazine were the running series "Small Fry" and "Dreams of Glory," which presented stubby, snub-nosed kids without grownups, busy with street life or at the beach, fighting Comanches or taking a bath or smoking an illicit Egyptian Deity cigarette. There were labelling tag lines but fewer captions; the joy in the drawing had become more important than the jokes. The Steig ragamuffins, by the way, provided useful antimatter to Peter Arno's svelte couples in evening clothes and Helen Hokinson's ladies'-club dowagers, which had established their place in the magazine some years prior.



Steig kept changing. A period of symbolic, heavily inked depictions of the human condition produced book collections with dire titles—"The Lonely Ones," "Ruminations"—but his line soon began to grow lighter and amazingly free. On a tip from his son Jeremy, a jazz flautist, in the sixties, he had stopped working from sketches and would wait, pen in hand at his drawing board, to act on whatever idea or style came next. Satyrs and brooding lions, rooster painters, cats strumming mandolins, clowns on horseback, graying fauns, naked damosels regarded by friars or foxes soon crowded these pages. "Please! Not today!" pleads a tired dragon to still another knight. But Steig was never content simply with the long-ago or the sweetly fantastic. In a drawing that ran a couple of years ago, a cat and a dog sit at opposite ends of a Central Park bench, each dressed in a suit and tie. The hound is staring mysteriously and angrily into the middle distance, while the cat regards him out of the corner of his eye, clearly thinking, *Uh-oh, what's with this guy?*: New York.

Steig's covers, meantime, had become more frequent and less cautious, bursting with yellows, pale greens, and electric mauves: a small girl's birthday, almost out of Bonnard; five Rothko-purple monster masks springing out of a jack-in-the-box. Touching everyone and influencing none, he was beyond imitation. Only Saul Steinberg, perhaps, produced so many absolute surprises in these pages, or in such volume: a hundred and twenty-one covers and sixteen hundred and seventy-six drawings. Another hundred-odd drawings, of every description, await publication, almost confirming an old impression that there would always be a fresh Steig in this new issue or the one next week.

Bill Steig was domestic and familial—he was married four times, finally to Jeanne Doron, an artist and writer, for the past thirty-five years—but famously kept a Wilhelm Reichian Orgone Box at home, as well, which he visited daily in search of energy. It worked, plainly—*something* worked. "Roland the Minstrel Pig," which appeared in 1968, was among the first of his more than twenty-five celebrated and beloved children's books, some aimed at the very young but most, or perhaps all of them (including some vigorous, straightforward novels for young teens), apparently intended to satisfy or explore the childlike spirit that he held onto so firmly. One of them, "Shrek!," was made into the immensely popular DreamWorks cartoon feature and brought the Steigs a nice bundle for their old age. " 'Sylvester and the Magic Pebble,' 'Amos & Boris,' and maybe the funny, funny 'Doctor De Soto' are absolute classics—among the handful of best children's books ever," a New York schoolteacher (my wife, in full disclosure) said the other day. "They're touching but not sentimental, and they bring young children ideas they've not experienced before. You want to keep them around the house forever."

Bill Steig at home—in his and Jeanne's roomy Back Bay apartment in Boston—remained wary and unsweet in old age. He was midsized and strong, with a shock of thick, upbrushed hair, a long face, and a darkly intelligent or impatient stare. A visitor a few years ago mentioned the pleasant view from the living-room windows—a modest church on the corner, a line of vintage brownstones, the Charles River not far off—but Steig could never forget his old second-floor apartment, off Sixth Avenue in the Village, where he had looked down at a steady passage of pedestrians and dogs and noisy traffic. "God damn," he said, "how can you be happy in a place where the windows look out on nothing?" Years before, Steig had asked his art editor of that era, James Geraghty, if other artists complained as much as he did, and was told that he clearly outwhined all the other *New Yorker* artists put together. At about the same time, Geraghty, in a perhaps placating note, wrote, "Dear Bill: Recently I have had the occasion to examine thousands of cartoons that have appeared in *The New Yorker*. One of the impressions remaining to me from this ordeal is the conviction that it would probably not be too extravagant to surmise that in all the history of graphic expressiveness your genius is unsurpassed: for sensitivity and comic perception of the human plight; for loveliness of line, for constant renewal, constant freshness. (The phrase 'graphic expressiveness' is too limiting, but I can't think of another at the moment.) My best, Jim."

—*Roger Angell*

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
RIGHT TRADE, WRONG TIME

Speculators get a bad rap. In the popular imagination they're greedy, heedless, and amoral, adept at price manipulations and dirty tricks. In reality, they often play a key role in making markets run smoothly. Their frequent trades make it easier for the rest of us to find someone to trade with, and their perpetual hunt for market inefficiencies can make prices more accurate. But sometimes speculators really are just greedy and amoral. Certainly that's true of the hedge funds that are at the heart of Wall Street's latest scandal, which surfaced last month when New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer brought civil charges against a New Jersey hedge fund called Canary Capital, which is run by Edward Stern, a son of the former *Village Voice* owner Leonard Stern. Canary, Spitzer alleges, engaged in an elaborate bunco straight out of David Maurer's classic "The Big Con," effectively betting on horse races (in this case, mutual-fund prices) after they'd already been run. Canary operated the scheme with the help of mutual funds owned by some of the country's biggest financial institutions, including Bank of America, Bank One, and Janus Capital. In the weeks since, it's become clear that Canary (which quickly settled the charges) was not alone, and a host of mutual funds and brokerage houses have been implicated.

The offending strategies are called "late trading" and "market timing." Late trading is illegal; market timing isn't, though most funds say they actively discourage it. Both take advantage of the fact that mutual-fund prices don't change during the day, the way stock prices do. Instead, they're set once, at 4 P.M. This establishes a level playing field for all investors: if you buy before four o'clock, you get that day's price, and if you buy after four o'clock you get the next day's price. Canary, though, conspired to buy funds after four o'clock while still paying that day's price. So when important news broke after four—news that was likely to boost the market or a particular fund the next day—Canary could buy the fund's shares and then flip them for a quick and easy profit. That's late trading.

Market timers play similar games with, among other things, mutual funds that have a lot of international stocks. Markets overseas close long before 4 P.M. New York time. The Tokyo Stock Exchange, for instance, closes at 2 A.M. So international mutual-fund prices, based on closing stock prices that are hours old, are "stale." If something important happens in the U.S. market that will probably boost overseas markets the next day—say, a big tech rally—market timers buy the international mutual fund at its current cheap, stale price and then sell it the next day at a tidy profit.

The victims are ordinary investors; the profits come right out of their pockets. Hedge funds like Canary are the fluke worms of Wall Street, feeding on the strength of others. A Stanford Business School study found that this kind of market timing could be robbing investors of more than four billion dollars a year. Usually, big profits can be earned only if one takes on significantly more risk or uncovers new information. But the late traders and market timers risked little and uncovered nothing, since the news they traded on was already public. The late traders made money because they were able to trade when no one else could. Stern racked up some big returns, but it isn't very hard to score touchdowns while your opponent is sitting back in the locker room.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

So how did Canary and its ilk get away with all this? Bribery, more or less. According to Spitzer, Canary cut a deal with the manager of a Bank of America mutual fund, who allowed it to trade until 6:30 P.M. In exchange, Canary parked millions of dollars in Bank of America bond funds. Canary also allegedly paid a firm called Security Trust a percentage of its profits in exchange for the right to trade after hours. Other mutual funds have given hedge funds market-timing privileges in exchange for their business. Janus has admitted that it let firms engage in market timing, even though objections were raised within the company. In April, for instance, Richard Garland, the C.E.O. of Janus's international division, sent the following e-mail to a grumbler there: "I have no interest in building a business around market timers, but at the same time I do not want to turn away $10-20m!" The exclamation point says it all.

In a famous essay about a Moroccan bazaar, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz demonstrated that in the economy of the bazaar information is unreliable, and you can never be sure that you aren't being ripped off; success comes from having the best connections, rather than the best product or the best price. Modern economies, on the other hand, are built on the idea that trading should be impersonal rather than personal, and that whom you know should not influence what you pay. Mutual funds, in a way, are supposed to be the embodiment of that—truly democratic financial instruments, carefully regulated, transparent, open to all. Wall Street itself may be a bazaar economy, guided by personal connections, quid pro quos, and fleecings of the greater fool. But mutual funds were meant to be different.

In this respect, the late-trading scandal is even more troubling than Enron or WorldCom or the Internet bubble. Investors who kept their entire 401(k) in Enron stock were not entirely blameless, after all. They let their easy-money dreams get the better of their judgment. Most mutual-fund investors, though, can't be blamed. They thought they'd left the bazaar behind long ago. How were they supposed to know they were still handing their money over to the snake charmers?

—*James Surowiecki*

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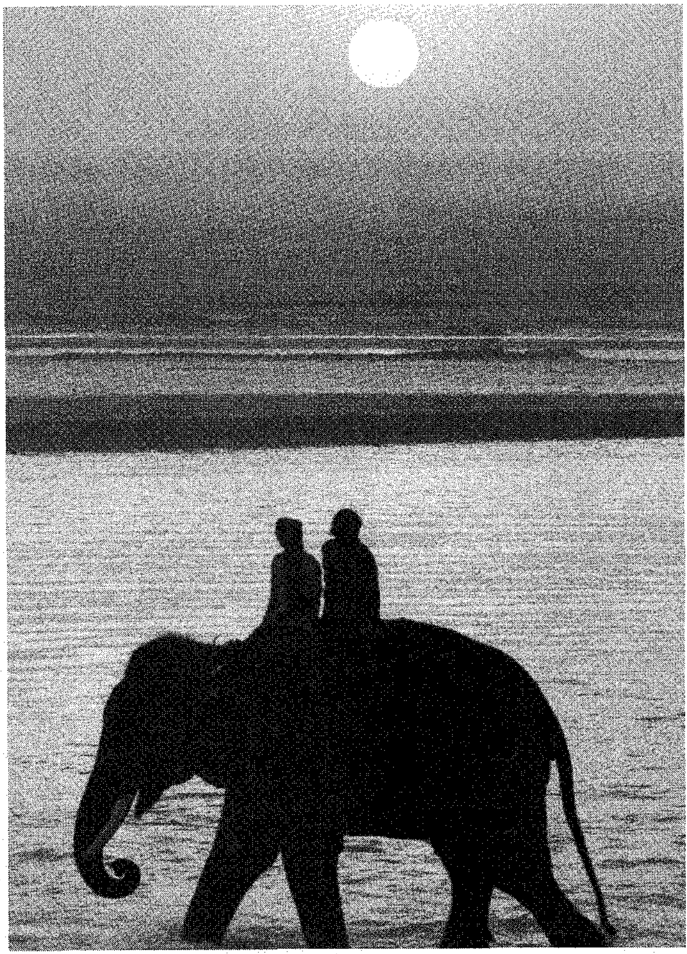

*In other words, you work on creating memories,
we'll work on making sure your money doesn't become one of them.

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NOTEBOOK

THAT DAY IN ROME

Movies and memory.

BY DON DeLILLO

We were walking on Via Condotti, in Rome, my wife and I, when we saw her coming toward us—the glamorous international movie star, wearing a shiny lavender blouse, suède pants, and long boots, and sporting a man on each arm.

This was twenty-five years ago, or longer, one of those occasions whose precise point in time has collapsed into other memories of the same place.

The actress looked happy, and this made us happy. It was fitting in this city, with its stirrings of Fellini, for such a woman to appear, and on this street as well, defined by ultrasmart shops and the venerable Caffè Greco, whose little sitting rooms were decorated with self-portraits of the great and famous.

Where do movie stars go, the ones whose names and faces have fallen out of time?

MARIO DE BIASI/KEITH DE LELLIS GALLERY

All these years later, the moment has resurfaced. I can see the street in late morning, recall clearly the squat iron stanchions with chain restraints to keep out auto traffic. There are the Spanish Steps in the near distance, banked with azaleas, and about three hundred people, mostly young, idling vivaciously in the sun. But I realize I'm no longer certain, at this level of separation, who the movie star was.

This comes as a shock to someone who can astonish old friends with detailed accounts of minor moments from an adolescence that's already tinted sepia. The memory begins to recur, periodically. I have a name in mind. I try to work the memory of the woman into the billowy image that the name generates. Why does it matter? It matters because it happened. It matters because she was happy, and we were happy seeing her. They are coming toward us, three figures with arms entwined, and there is a sense, in retrospect, that they are floating just above the street, and an intimation, as well, that one of them has just said something the others have found agreeable. But the woman herself is no longer distinct, shrouded by whatever process alters an event in long-term memory and makes it a kind of translation from the original. Something is lost, her face is lost, dissolved somewhere in the spongy protein of my cortex.

"Remember the actress? That time in Rome," I say, and add some elements of general chronology to render the setting. "Man on one arm, man on the other. It was Anita Ekberg, right?"

My wife says yes, Anita Ekberg, and describes the outfit she was wearing, offering a few confident details about material and color. But I'm not so confident about the actress herself. It should have been Anita Ekberg, considering the city and the tabloid spectacle of her presence in "La Dolce Vita." My wife says yes. But I'm not sure she believes it.

It is March. Everywhere, war is the talk. The memory comes and goes. What is it that matters here? Is it a woman on a Roman street and the brittle history her name might summon up—six or seven films, several forgettable husbands? There must be more than that. Every memory we have is, finally, of ourselves. If the memory of an experience is flawed, there is a rift in the continuity of self. I see the man to her left, or imagine him, maybe, reformulate him—cropped hair and a six-day beard that comes close to matching the residue on his head. There is less of us with each depleted memory.

When the hero of Walker Percy's novel "The Moviegoer" sees William Holden on a street in New Orleans, he notes how the actor is "shedding light as he goes." He adds, "An aura of heightened reality moves with him and all who fall within it feel it." How did I betray such a reality? I feel a little ripple of guilt. The actress I saw may not have been as enduring a figure as Holden or any number of his female peers, but she matters, in knee-high boots, hips lightly swinging. There are movie stars who provide certain ingredients in fixed proportions. They are iconic products of the moment. They disappear into the very context of their emergence. They have a past—a filmed record of their fleeting incandescence—but no discernible life span beyond that. Well-known theatre actors retire to private lives. Where do movie stars go, the ones whose names and faces have fallen out of time? Whom do they become when we forget them? Does it seem, even to them, that they've disappeared?

I drop the subject, then think of it again. The war is rumbling toward Baghdad. When I think of it again, there is a corrective element drifting in the background. Maybe the association is not Fellini, I think. It is James Bond that comes to mind. I don't know what makes this happen, and I forget it at once. It is drift, it is spillage, one of a number of stray thoughts, maybe a few dozen in the course of half a living minute. Time goes by. There is the enormous unstirred soup of daily living and thinking, the dreams that haunt the waking day, the telemarketing calls from convicted felons reading scripts, the faces in the waiting room at the doctor's office. Somewhere in these veers of routine experience it occurs to me that maybe James Bond is an idea worth acting upon, an inspired fling of consciousness. But I do not act upon it.

Why should I? Because it matters, because it happened. I think once or twice about a particular reference book on the shelf in the spare room with the videocassettes. It matters because movies matter. The structure of our dreams and memories, closed off from the world, has its communal counterpart in film. When we imagine an instant somewhere—a streak of silvery beach in a place we've never been to—or when we wake in a sweat from a dream we only half remember, or when memories occur to us, in fragments, with abrupt transitions, we find ourselves in subjective time and space, in the grip of the mind's own devices, and the moment is not unlike the pacing of a film, edited into snatches, flashes, segments of experience that represent a radical departure from the unbroken flow of the world around us. The film editor Walter Murch remarks that "one of the secret engines that allow cinema to work, and have the marvellous power over us that it does, is the fact that for thousands of years we have spent eight hours every night in a 'cinematic' dream-state, and so are familiar with this version of reality."

I have a friend who will call and say, without preface, "Give me the actress in 'Gummo' who appeared in an earlier movie that she also narrated, and don't say Sissy Spacek or you'll make me sick."

I say, "Linda Manz," and put down the phone.

Behind such paltry sport is an acknowledgment of the way in which movies can shape a layer of memory, leading us into a shared past, sometimes false, dreamlike, childlike, but a past that we've all agreed to inhabit. There are other hotbeds of memory, such as baseball, of course, rich in the mellow lore of names, dates, and arcane stats. But in film it is the image, most strikingly, that clings, sometimes a face or a gesture, sometimes an isolated scene. Who has stored the moment of delirium in Eisenstein's "Strike" when mounted troops urge their horses up the stairways and across the balconies and catwalks of a workers' housing complex? Are we seventeen people in the world, or countless thousands? Yes, you recall the uncanny menace of the sequence in "The Shining" when the boy pedals his tricycle through the halls of the empty hotel, followed by a Steadicam on wheels. But what about the unedited fragment in Claire Denis's beautiful film "Beau Travail," when a goatherd appears to throw a stone at the camera crew? We have no way of knowing with whom we share the memory of such scattered images. Imagine an immense global brain sprouting organically in the Arizona desert—but that's a movie in itself, from the science-fiction fifties.

Never mind all that. I have a vague impression that the reference book tucked among the videocassettes includes an index that lists not only actors and directors but general subjects as well. But where am I when I think of this? I don't know. I'm swiping my MetroCard through a turnstile scanner somewhere under Twenty-eighth Street. I forget the whole business. When I think of it again, I try to square the trivial nitwit nature of the undertaking with the fact that it continues to matter to me. The man to her left has a face, a personality. I don't see the man to her right at all, although he somehow shares the mood of general well-being.

In Rome, three million people have marched against the war. I think of one of Fellini's late movies, in which Anita Ekberg plays herself, and for a moment, in a slight panic, I can't recall the title. Then there it is, "Intervista," and there she is, onscreen, draped in enormous orange towels. She has a country house and large leaping dogs and resembles a housemother for Nordic handmaidens, those who will conduct the souls of the slain to Valhalla. Her guests are Fellini himself, Mastroianni himself, and a non-paparazzi film crew from Japan. The principals embrace and reminisce. Fellini looks at her and calls her "epic." Then they all watch a clip from "La Dolce Vita," and I watch with them, feeling time and lives fold over. But Anita Ekberg seems less and less the woman from that day in Rome.

My friend will call and say, "I want

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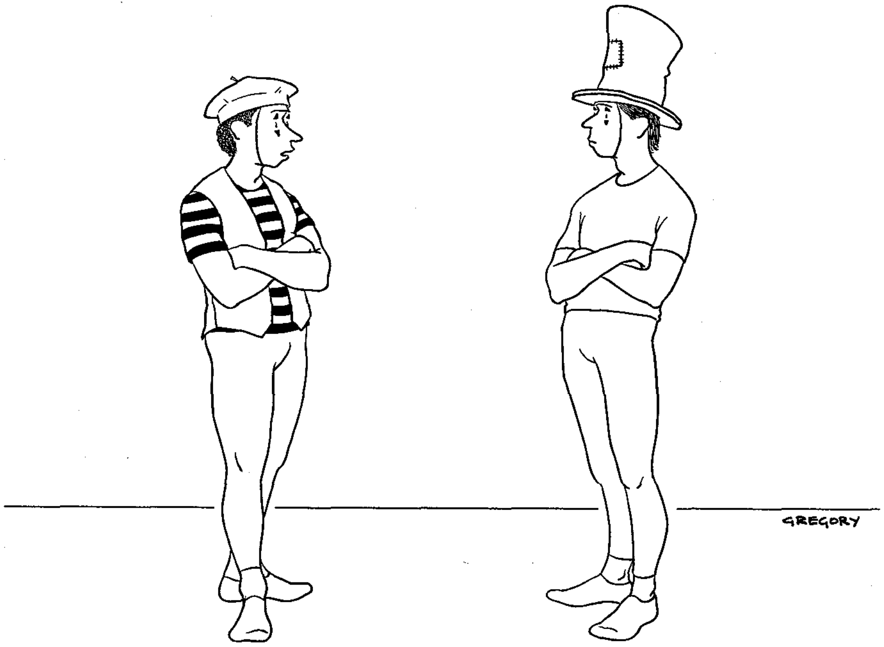


"Improv—that's where the big money is."

the name of the other man in 'The Appaloosa.'"

I will say, "John Saxon," knowing at once that he is referring to the featured actor who plays opposite Brando.

But I don't know the name of the woman on Via Condotti. All right. I go to the book and check the index. General subjects, under "B." Buddhism, Buddy movies, Bobsledding. Here it is, so simple—James Bond. The first film listed is "Casino Royale," not an actual Bond movie but a spoof. I haven't seen the movie, but I sense a connection. This is the path of enlightened inquiry. It feels right to me. I find the review, listed alphabetically, and barely have to glance at the cast list. There she is, Ursula Andress, and how could I have failed to know this?

You knew it before I did. How did I lose her? And where did the James Bond connection come from, decades later? The second question is answerable. Bond was all that was left of her in the skeins of memory, a career detail that emerged in response to my listless meditations. I've seen only a couple of Bond movies and she wasn't in those films, but that doesn't matter, of course. The link was there, one tiny splice in our pandemic of replication, which copies and passes on whatever's in the cultural air—noise, images, factoids, and disintegrating syntax.

"Remember the movie star we talked about not long ago. Who we were kidding ourselves was Anita Ekberg. In Rome that time. I finally figured out—"

My wife raises a hand, abruptly. This is a gesture on two levels. She is telling me, first, to be quiet so that she can think. She is also posting a notice of impending finality, the action that prefigures the utterance, because the name is rising through the memory murk, amid the rhythmic fluctuations of electric potential in her brain, and now it will surface, only seconds after the hand goes up.

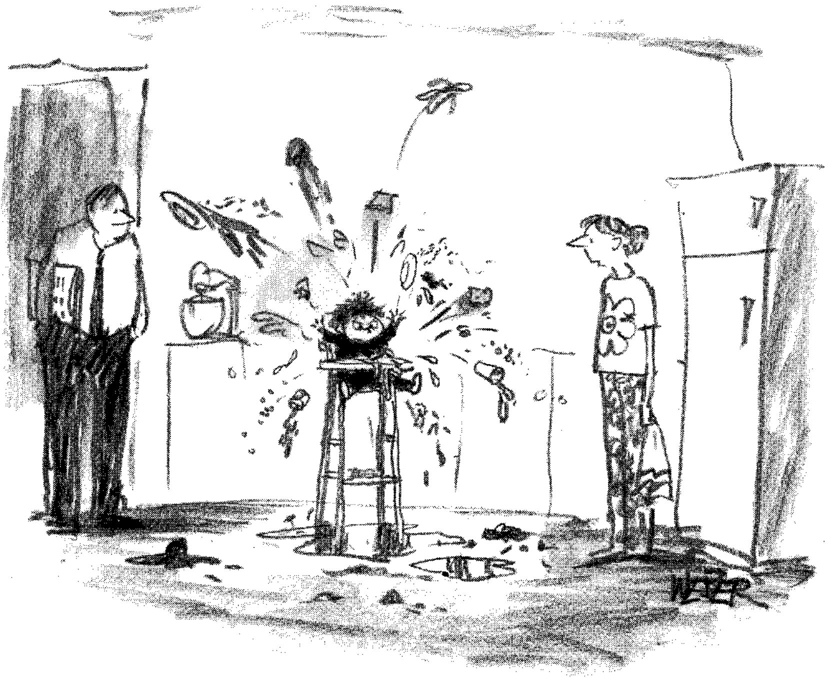
Ursula Andress.

We are happy again, not happy the way we were when we saw the actress in full stride on Via Condotti but happy, nevertheless, both for our sake and for hers.

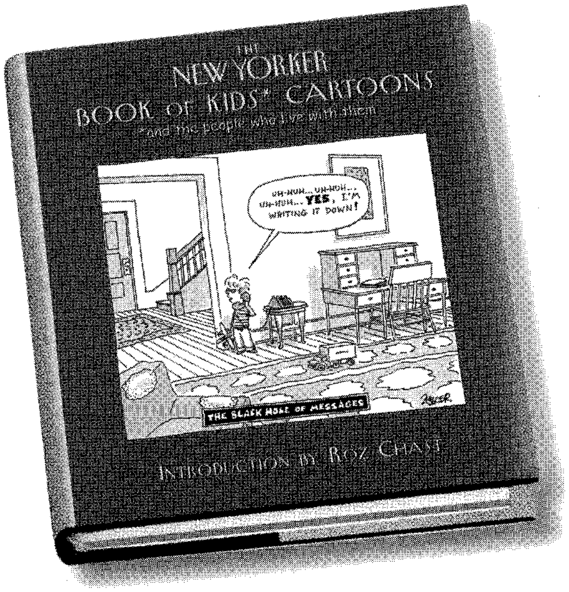
Less than a week later, as such things happen, I make another belated discovery, closely connected, and this one sends me to the Guggenheim Museum to look at "Cremaster 5," the last film in the recent cycle by Matthew Barney, and she is there, of course, onscreen, playing the Queen of Chain, gowned, robed, and ruffled, flanked by a pair of epicene attendants and accompanied by the Magician, the Giant, and the Diva, in an operatic narrative that also includes water sprites and a number of lavishly crested pigeons trailing satin ribbons.

Nearer Fellini, after all, than James Bond. ♦

Rediscover the child within...



"He has some food issues."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and the people who live with them
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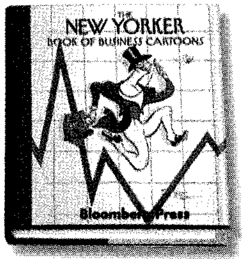
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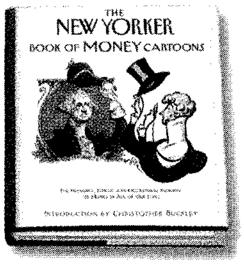
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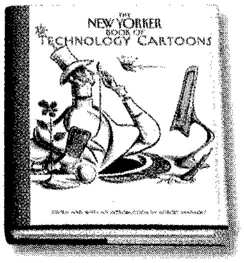
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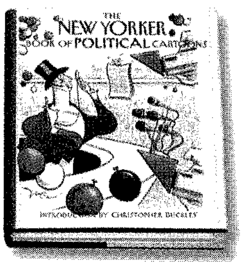
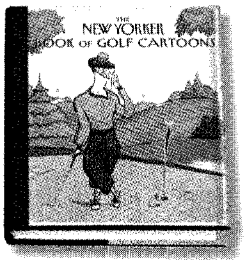
BOOK OF TECHNOLOGY CARTOONS


THE NEW YORKER
BOOK OF POLITICAL CARTOONS
INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY


THE NEW YORKER
BOOK OF GOLF CARTOONS

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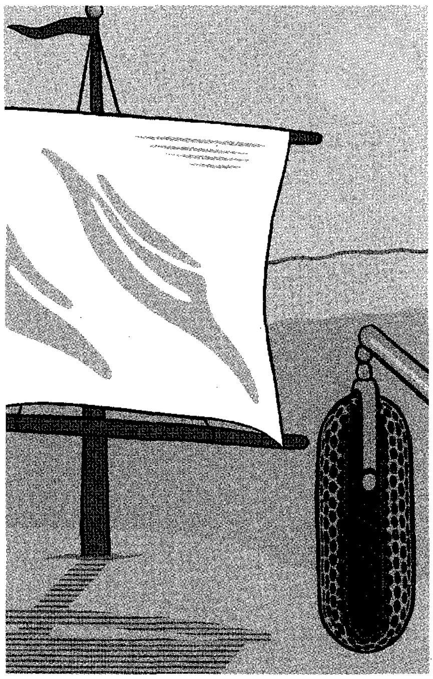
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARTS AND CRAFTS • SOUND DESIGNER

WICKED WIND



MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

If you want to re-create the auditory experience of being in a storm aboard a nineteenth-century British frigate, get yourself a pickup truck, some wood, a few acoustic blankets, and about a thousand feet of rope. Then drive out to the Mojave Desert and build a large wooden frame in the bed of the truck. String the rope back and forth around the frame, using a turnbuckle to make it good and taut, until all thousand feet have been spent. Face the truck head-on into a thirty-mile-an-hour wind, and lean hard on the gas pedal. Once you hit seventy, you're in business; the sound of the air meeting the lines of rope ought to approximate the shrieking of the wind in the frigate's rigging—a foretaste of what the novelist Patrick O'Brian might call "a coming dissolution of all natural bonds, an apocalyptic upheaval, a right dirty night." For added effect, try holding a barbecue grill out the window and turning it at various angles as you cruise. Muffle any peripheral truck noise, as needed, with the blankets.

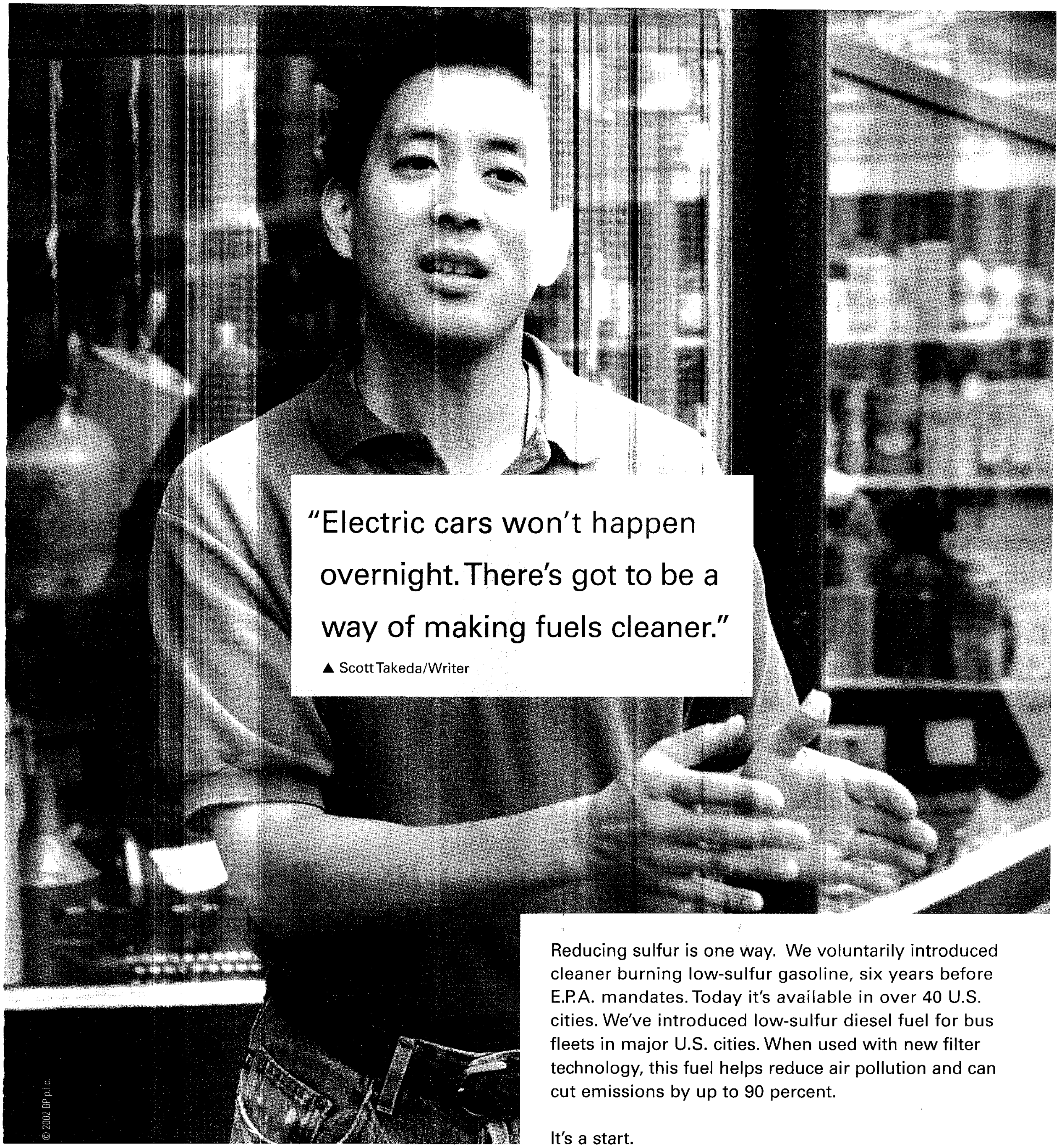
This, at least, is the approach that Richard King came up with recently as the sound designer for "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World," the forthcoming adaptation of O'Brian's nautical series, set aboard the Royal Navy's H.M.S. Surprise during the Napoleonic Wars. King, who is forty-nine years old and a lifelong sailor, was charged not only with the task of supervising the editing of the film's soundtrack (distinct from any musical score or accompaniment) but also with recording all the individual sounds—musket fire, sloshing bilge, creaking wood—that need to be incorporated. In some cases, this requires creating the sounds from scratch.

Thus the trip to the desert. "Nobody wants to take their ships out in a gale," King said. "I actually tried to get myself on a ship somewhere in the world that would put itself in that situation." The Mojave, it turns out, is a convenient substitute, because it gets very windy, and the wind patterns are predictable, typically blowing from the southwest. King didn't limit his Mojave recording sessions to truck work, either. "We got some sails off a big square-rigger and took them out to the desert and built a giant framework—a mast, essentially—and rigged the sails so we could get them to flap at various intensities," he said. "So we got discrete sail flaps without any sound of water in the background."

King and his crew of eight editors made it a point of pride not to rely on "library" files, a standard collection of movie-ready sounds (car honks, airplanes taking off). Given that "Master and Commander" features extended battle scenes with plenty of cannon fire, forgoing the library necessitated still more ingenuity. "All the sounds I had heard in period movies of cannons going off were just big loud booms," King said. "But something O'Brian refers to a lot is the screaming of shot flying overhead." So he found a group of artillery collectors in northern Michigan who had cannons that were capable of firing vintage ammunition, and set to work re-creating the types of shot described in O'Brian's novels: round shot ("basically, their ship-to-ship—when they wanted to punch a hole in the hull"), chain shot ("two cannonballs connected by a two-foot piece of chain, which would spin around and take out the rigging and sails and mast"), grapeshot ("cannisters with a number of smaller balls inside—anti-personnel weapons that would shoot across the deck to kill as many men as they could"). Then, in January, King and his crew set up a firing range at a National Guard base nearby that had all but closed for the winter. ("They had to snowplow the range for us to shoot.") They fired eighty rounds, recording both the initial explosions and, following another lead from O'Brian, the in-flight racket, which proved to be almost as loud as the booms themselves. "There was a concrete berm five hundred yards downrange which we could get behind and set up mikes and fire over," King said. "Nobody, as far as I know, had ever recorded any of this stuff. It sounded like nothing I've ever heard before." Imagine a cross between a piece of paper being ripped and a racecar speeding by.

Not all the work required of a sound designer is so elaborate. "The other day, I was trying to get a sound for a sail," King said. "It's kind of a mysterious scene in the film, where we look up and we see a sail, kind of loose, very softly moving in the light breeze. And I'm thinking, What would be cool there? I have a microphone in my room, and I turned on the recorder and did a *hawwwww*—a low breathing sound—and added some reverb to it. It worked."

—*Ben McGrath*



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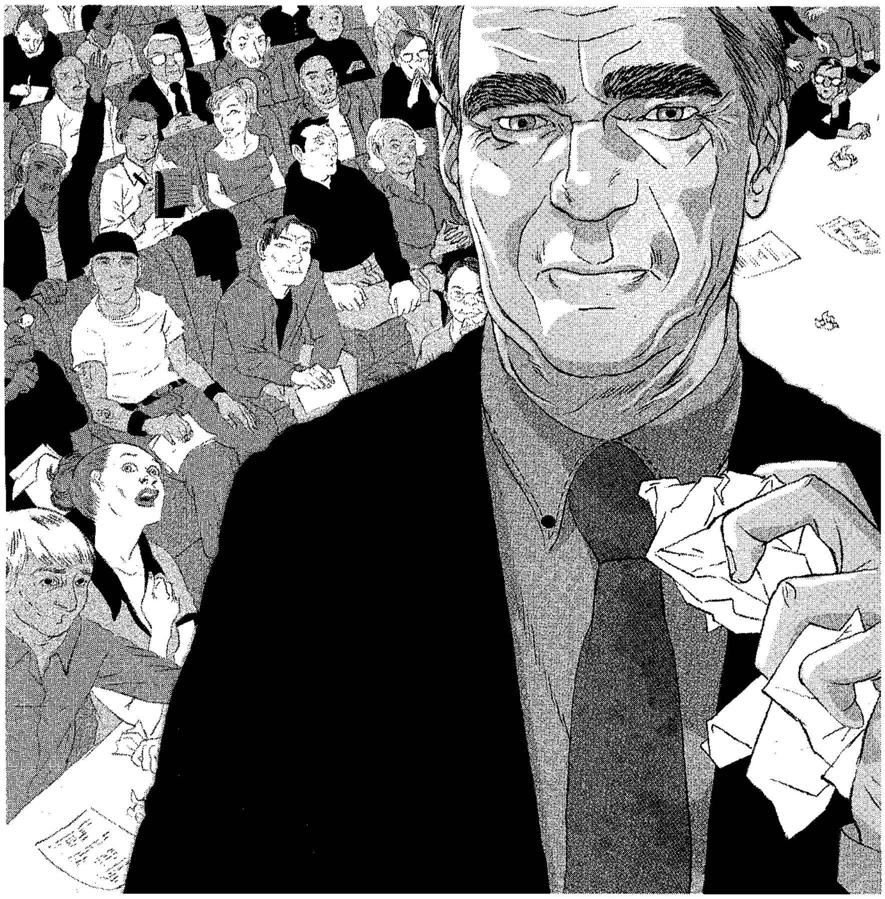
LIFE AND LETTERS

THE REAL McKEE

Lessons of a screenwriting guru.

BY IAN PARKER

Robert McKee, the screenwriting instructor, was having lunch the other day at the back of a dark Irish bar on Lexington Avenue. He had just told two hundred people in a Hunter College lecture hall that there were five elements without which a thriller was probably not a thriller: cheap surprise; a false ending; the protagonist shown to be a victim; a speech made in praise of the villain; and a hero-at-the-mercy-of-the-villain scene. Then, announcing a one-hour break, he had walked out into a light rain, followed by a number of students whose desire for a little extracurricular McKee outstripped their fear that he might somehow humiliate them, as he has been known to do. They waylaid him on the sidewalk, the way Nicolas Cage, playing the troubled screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, waylaid Brian Cox, playing Robert McKee, in Spike Jonze's 2002 film, "Adaptation." (Kaufman introduces himself as "the guy you yelled at this morning." McKee responds, "I need more.")



Robert McKee says his students "know I'm not a phony, I'm not selling them a dream."

TOMER HANUKA

McKee, who is sixty-two, and likes to wear dark shirts with two buttons undone at the neck, suggesting a career in extortion, lit a cigarette, then walked down the street while listening to an agitated young man say that the last time he had heard McKee speak the effect had been so overwhelming that he had fallen ill. "All the stuff you don't want to face, which is to say emotional truth, the stuff of good storytelling, it was coming out!" the young man said, very fast. "It was coming out in such a way that it caused this pain in my back, because subconscious growth is such a painful process." One by one, the students dropped away, until, by the time McKee reached the bar, a few blocks away, only two were left. He asked them to join him in a booth, where he ordered a ham-and-cheese sandwich and a beer.

His guests were in their thirties. One worked in health insurance, and said that in ten years as "an aspiring screenwriter" he had not managed to finish a single script. He had taken a McKee course three times, and he had read McKee's 1997 book, "Story," many more times. "I'm starting to wonder if I have the patience for the whole process," he said. McKee looked at him. "Well, you might also wonder if you have the *talent*," he said. McKee, who used to be an actor, rarely speaks a sentence that does not call for a word so stressed that he bares his teeth.

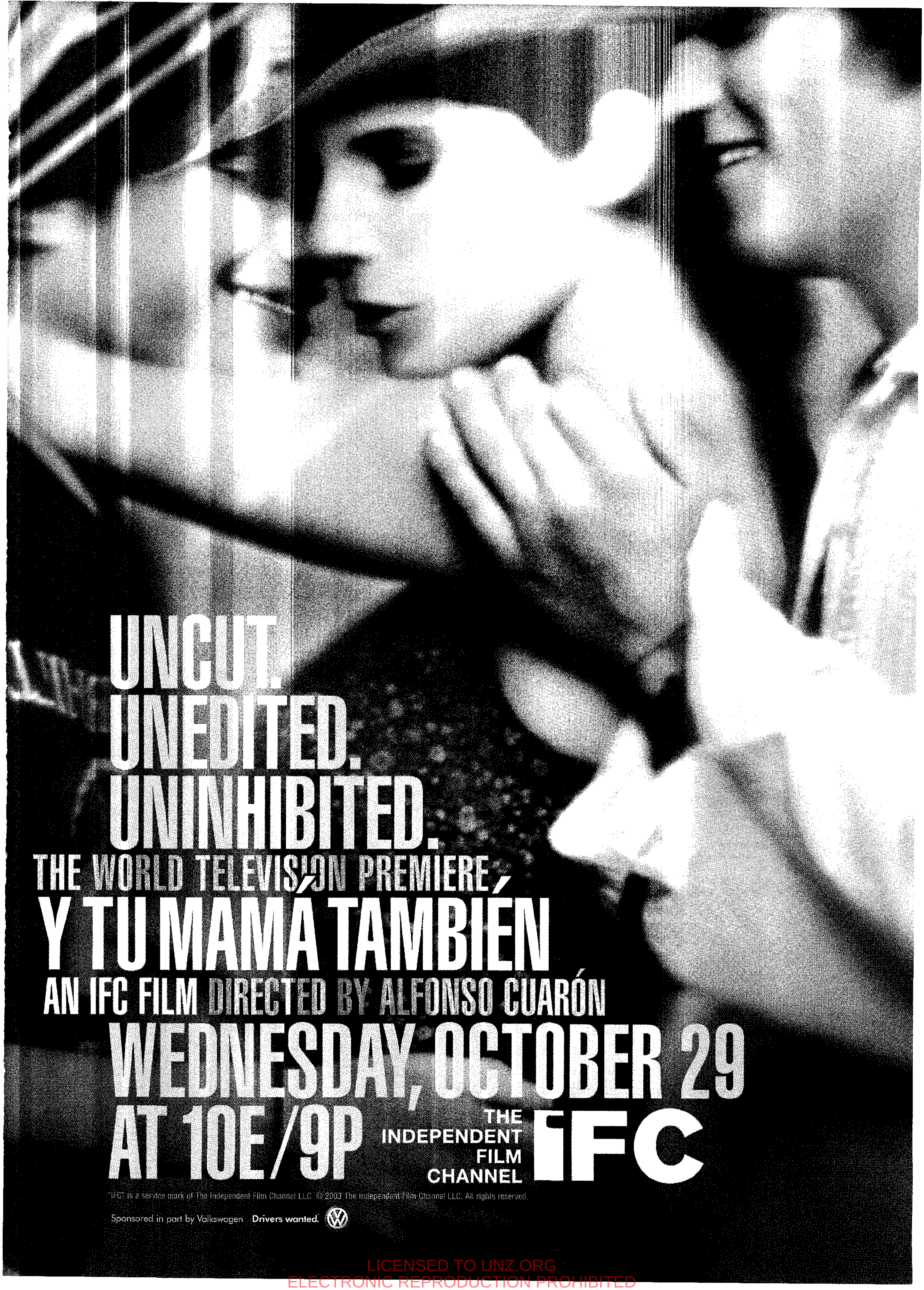
The other student, whose name was Steven List, said he had already sold a script and three pitches but he was struggling with another screenplay, which was based on true events. As List described it, an American mathematician had disappeared while on vacation in Chile in the nineteen-eighties. The State Department had told his family that he had drowned while hiking, but his sister did not believe it. She flew to Chile, where she learned that her brother may have been abducted and held in a remote religious colony led by a charismatic neo-Nazi who worked for the Chilean secret police as a subcontractor in torture and assassination—an arrangement supposedly well known to Washington. List had optioned this story from the sister. McKee usually has a rule against discussing a student's work in progress, but he allowed List to continue.

"I could do it from the brother's point of view, but he ends up dead," List said. "I've got a villain. I know there's a story."

"You don't have a story," McKee said in a smoker's growl. "You have a subject matter: this bizarre post-Nazi cult world. But who cares?"

"Well, the facts . . ."

"No, no, the truth of the matter is: Who cares? What you've got is a setting, and a piece of history. You've got to ask big questions. 'Why am I attracted to this material? Because I'm Jewish and I want to get at those Nazis one more time?' My advice is stop focussing on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this one guy. I don't think there's anything at the end of that road."

The screenwriter considered his choices. "I've got to find a spine, a protagonist. I've been thinking, the sister . . ."

"That film's been done, and it's called 'Missing,' " McKee said. "Why do a woman-in-jeopardy story? You've got an organization in cahoots with the Chilean government, in cahoots with the United States government, which has caused the death of thousands—torture, suffering, etc.—and as a result we've got a woman in jeopardy? It's like hiring an elephant to pull a little red wagon. I can tell you a woman-in-jeopardy story: she gets a flat tire in the middle of the night, some guy offers her a lift." He went on, "What is interesting here is it's an example of the way the United States has habitually accommodated tyrants as long as they're our allies."

List leaned forward across the table and said, "That's what I'm interested in! We've protected monsters!" In the story of List's story, we seemed to be approaching what McKee calls an "inciting incident": things were about to change.

"So start with a guy who's a bureaucrat in Washington, works for something other than the C.I.A.," McKee said. "Something pops up, a missing professor." He paused. "In the English tradition, a murder is committed and the investigation drives inward: you know, you've got six possible murderers. In the American tradition, a murder is committed, we start to investigate, and it turns out to encompass all of society. That's what your thing sounds like. An innocuous note saying that a professor has disappeared while hiking in the Andes, and some little bureaucrat is charged with finding out what happened, and he finds a conspiracy that runs to the White House. It's 'The Parallax View.' "

"That's brilliant," List said.

An hour later, back in the lecture room, List was still buzzing with enthusiasm: "You know, I've talked about this project with any number of studios, and they didn't see it—and he spotted it in five minutes. Oh, that was extraordinary."

Screenwriting instruction is a transformative business: students are there to learn about the way a protagonist undergoes change in the two hours of a movie (dumb to smart, nobody to somebody, bureaucrat to whistle-blower); and they learn about the change they may have to undergo before they are able to create such a character. And students may also get a sense of the change to come in their lives when word reaches one of them that a studio chief was charmed by his unsolicited script, and would like him immediately to bring to a close his life in, say, high-school history teaching and start a career focussed on ambling around a Malibu mansion wearing expensive track pants while balls of scrunched-up yellow legal paper drift across the patio in a warm breeze. The forces at work in other branches of adult education may be similar but are likely to be weaker: students at a screenwriting seminar are learning how to create, on the page, a story of struggle and resolution that at least appears to echo the struggle and hoped-for resolution of the screenwriting life. The work promises to precipitate the action it often represents, which is a life redrawn—a star, one way or another, being born. So it's easy to see why an effective screenwriting instructor could become a commanding figure in the life of his students, and why McKee is more frequently referred to as a "guru" than anyone giving classes in animal husbandry.

McKee himself leads a life mostly unaffected by screenwriting success. He has written and sold many screenplays, but, if one excludes "Abraham," commissioned by Turner Network Television in 1994, none of them have been made into a movie. McKee has houses in Bel Air and Arizona, and a handsome black Jaguar, and membership in a country club just north of the Getty Museum, but these are mostly the benefits of a rather uncinematic life of repetition: McKee has given the same screenplay course for twenty years—the same three-day, thirty-hour performance during which he assumes, variously, the roles of after-dinner raconteur, gloomy controversialist, and freewheeling, cross-disciplinary university lecturer. Among the estimated forty thousand people who have taken the course are David Bowie, Ed Burns, Drew Carey (twice), John Cleese (three times), Kirk Douglas, Faye Dunaway, Emilio Estevez, Eddie Izzard, Quincy Jones (three times), Diane Keaton, Barry Manilow, Joan Rivers, Julia Roberts, Meg Ryan, Joel Schumacher, Brooke Shields, and Gloria Steinem. McKee is careful not to take direct credit, but he recently estimated that his alumni's films have earned more than a billion dollars at the box office in the past year or so: he was thinking of the work of Andrew Stanton (who wrote and co-directed "Finding Nemo"), Peter Jackson (who co-wrote and directed "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers"), Steve Koren (who co-wrote "Bruce Almighty"), and Zak Penn

WE MET AT THE END OF THE PARTY

We met at the end of the party
When most of the drinks were dead
And all the glasses dirty:
"Have this that's left," you said.
We walked through the last of summer,
When shadows reached long and blue
Across days that were growing shorter:
You said: "There's autumn too."
Always for you what's finished
Is nothing, and what survives
Cancels the failed, the famished,
As if we had fresh lives
From that night on, and just living
Could make me unaware
Of June, and the guests arriving,
And I not there.

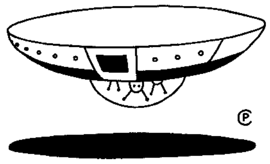
—*Philip Larkin*

(who co-wrote the story for "X2"). In McKee's promotional literature William Goldman calls him "knowledgeable and passionate"; Lawrence Kasdan describes McKee's course as "stimulating, an innovative approach to the age-old challenge"; and Akiva Goldsman calls himself "a believer." Pixar sends ten people to every McKee seminar in San Francisco; Miramax sent five or six to New York in 2001. Antonia Ellis, a producer of "Sex and the City," lists McKee's course as "additional post-graduate course work" on her HBO biography. Last year, McKee gave his three-day seminar twice in Los Angeles, New York, and London, and once in Boston, San Francisco, Miami, Dallas, Las Vegas, Sydney, Melbourne, and Paris. This year, he made his first appearance in Singapore, where he was asked not to use the word "fuck" onstage, and in November he will teach in Pamplona. McKee has given a private, truncated version of his course for ABC News. He has been hired to teach C.E.O.s the commercial virtues of telling a compelling (rather than a blindly upbeat) story of a corporation's life. He has been invited to make a presentation to NASA. Recently, for senior members of an Arizona-based church, he adapted the seminar as "The Glory of Story."

Before the arrival of cinema, there were how-to guides for aspiring novelists and playwrights. Then, when movies appeared, so did books like "How to Write Moving Picture Plays," by William Lewis Gordon (1913), and "How to Write a Photoplay," by A. W. Thomas (1914). Thomas nodded to Aristotle (as most modern guides do), and used the kind of subheadings—"Modeling the Dramatic," "Hiding the Climax"—that seem to call out for PowerPoint software. According to Gordon, "in practically every story there should be an element of rivalry with one or more obstacles to overcome." He steered his readers away from children, animals, autobiographical stories, Westerns, expensive military plots, and slapstick. "THE SCENE ACTION MUST BE THE EXPLANATION AND TELL THE STORY," he wrote, exactly anticipating the spirit (and uppercase letters) of his modern successors.

Today, a fair-sized Barnes & Noble will carry about sixty books in a similar vein, including "Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters: Storytelling Secrets from the Greatest Mind in Western Civilization." Most are alert to the obvious booby trap in the how-to-write genre: the author has not written a hit screenplay, and so offers guidance only in general structural principles—a form, not a formula. All the same, many of these books—and their accompanying courses and software packages—find it hard to resist dropping a number into the title, to hint that science will take charge of the slippery mess of words on a page: "How Not to Write a Screenplay: 101 Common Mistakes Most Screenwriters Make"; "500 Ways to Beat the Hollywood Script Reader: Writing the Screenplay the Reader Will Recommend"; "Power Screenwriting: The 12 Stages of Story Development." In "How to Write a Movie in 21 Days," Viki King explains that "by page 45, your hero has reacted to what happened on page 30. He is now different, and we begin to see that here, in a symbolic scene. Also, by page 45 we begin to see a resolution of the original desire your character had on page 10."

The first modern best-seller in the genre was "Screenplay," by Syd Field. First published in 1979, the book still carries a special thanks to "Werner" and "all the people in *est*," and half a million copies have been printed. Derived from a course that Field taught at Sherwood Oaks Experimental College, a private school in California that sought to use people active in the industry as instructors, including Dustin Hoffman and Paul Newman, "Screenplay" is a slim, friendly, upbeat book, with exclamation points and one-sentence paragraphs. Movies had always had beginnings, middles, and ends. Since "Screenplay," they have had three acts: Act I is the setup; Act II is the confrontation; and Act III is the resolution. "Plot points" spin the story around, from act to act. (According to Field, who argues that he is teaching "only form, not formula," the second act runs from page 30 to page 90.) Field's language burrowed deep into Hollywood—a fact that some find maddening, including John Truby, a screenwriting instructor with a standing just below that of McKee and Field. Truby, who teaches seminars and markets a computer program called "Truby's Blockbuster," recently said that he regarded Field's three-act idea to be "the triumph of complete superficiality over any type of content."



McKee, who says he has "no competition," presents himself in contrast to Field as a bold, angry intellectual. "Story," in its first few pages, praises Ingmar Bergman and quotes from Yeats and Jean Anouilh; the book has only ever been available in a hardback edition, which has sold more than a hundred thousand copies in the United States. McKee chose Brian Cox to play him in "Adaptation," after looking over a list of names that included Michael Caine, Terence Stamp, and Christopher Plummer; but one guesses that he would have been most pleased with Harold Bloom. "'Story' is about eternal, universal forms, not formulas," McKee writes at the start of his book, but for him this construction becomes more than a disclaimer: it is his platform. McKee displays his own relative impotence, and so—in a happy paradox—establishes his intellectual force. Those born with talent will succeed, every one else will probably fail. Life is "drudgery and disappointment"; and death lurks around the corner. When I met McKee in London earlier this year, the day before a "Story" seminar, he told me, "What I teach is the truth: you're in over your head, this is not a hobby, this is an art form and a profession, and your chances of success are very, very slim. And if you've got only one story, get the fuck out of here. Writers are people with stories to tell. I think I do a great service, by sending the dilettantes out of the door. The amazing thing is that, no matter how hard I try to drive them out of the art, the reputation I've gained by being honest brings them to the course. They know I'm not a phony, I'm not selling them a dream."

McKee grew up in Clawson, a northern suburb of Detroit; his father was an engineer at General Motors and his mother worked in real estate. "My father was in many ways a marvellous guy," McKee told me. "He got me into reading. He had high standards. But he was also a paranoid alcoholic." McKee was sixteen when his father left the family. "When I was in psychoanalysis, it was a lot to do with my relationship with my father," McKee said. "And my analyst said that the central conflict in any man's life is with his father, and you're in a dilemma: you want to impress your father, but you cannot surpass him, because if you do, it humiliates him, even if he's dead." McKee's mother "had a great imagination, but in many ways was a child. When I was ten, she came to me and said, 'Bobby, what shall I do about your father?' I was counselling her." McKee had two younger bothers. One died in middle age; the other became a senior Ford executive, and has now retired and lives in Florida.

McKee was a golf caddie from the age of twelve, and he won an Evans scholarship (given to caddies) to the University of Michigan. He had liked the idea of a career in dentistry, because of the free time for golfing it seemed to promise, but, after being given a part in a student play, he decided to major in English. He took a master's in theatre, and was taught by the late Kenneth Rowe, who had also taught Arthur Miller. McKee became a theatre actor and a director, first in Michigan, then in London, and then, in the late sixties, in New York. A first marriage, to a stage entertainer, ended after eight months.

McKee remarried and returned to Ann Arbor in 1970 to pursue a Ph.D. in film studies. There, he and his wife had two sons, and he made two well-received short films—one an adaptation of a Tennessee Williams play, "Talk to Me Like the Rain," and the other from his own screenplay, "A Day Off," about two lonely men spending an awkward, drunken day together. He did not receive his Ph.D., failing to finish a dissertation on narrative design (years later, much of it emerged as "Story"); instead, McKee took a teaching job at San Diego State University, and wrote the first of his screenplays, "Dead Files," about a hired assassin who seeks psychiatric help when he discovers that he can no longer kill. He sold it to AVCO-Embassy Films in 1976, but, in the first of many such disappointments, the company changed hands, and the project was dropped. "You get your heart broken again and again and again," McKee told me. He took work as a story analyst for NBC and United Artists, and also began writing episodes for television dramas. He directed "Greeks 6–Trojans 5," a play set entirely in the body of the Trojan horse, and wrote "Miss Julie Montgomery," a screenplay that recast Strindberg's "Miss Julie" as an interracial period love story set in the South; it has been optioned four times and never made—although last summer McKee was pleased to see that it was optioned again, twenty years after it was written. (He showed me the script, which in places has a miniseries feel to it, as when Julie's father says, "And old times here are not forgotten. . . . If all goes well today, I'll be changing times . . . from the governor's mansion.") McKee's other scripts are "all dead," he said. A career was visible but just out of reach. "Of course you mind," he told me with a slight sneer. But he consoles himself with the thought of the odds against him—only one in twenty scripts optioned ever gets made—and the amount of money that some of his unmade films earned him. He told me, "Warner Bros. said, 'Bob, we want "Jagged Edge" goes rock and roll for Cher.' I wrote a thing called 'Trophy,' for an embarrassing amount of money, about a rock star who murders a husband and gets away with it. They loved it. Loved it." But apparently Cher did not.

In 1981, McKee began teaching a course called "Story Structure" at Sherwood Oaks. His audiences grew, and in 1983 Jeff Dowd, who later became a key figure in the world of American independent film, and the Coen brothers' chief inspiration for the character of Jeff Lebowski in "The Big Lebowski," asked McKee to teach a compressed, three-day version in Seattle. It was with this gruelling format that McKee began travelling the country, and the world. (After his second marriage failed, he lived for several years in Britain, in a remote spot on the Cornish coast.) McKee became part of a great boom in screenwriting instruction which had its roots in the end of the studio system and the subsequent rise of the American auteur director: a screenwriter being one step from a director, and a director being God. The boom was further propelled by pub-

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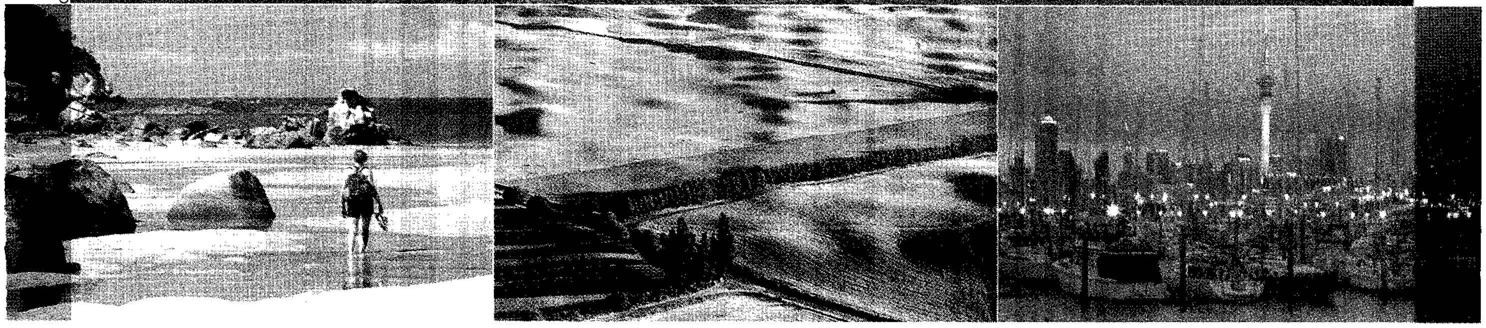
and more

AND: A calendar of *New Yorker*
events across the country

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: © HOLGER LEUE; FAY LOONEY; GILBERT VAN REENAN; GRANT STIRLING FOR TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

THE REEL PICTURE



BY RICHARD J. PIETSCHMANN

New Zealand is ready for its close-up. This year alone, the South Pacific nation has hosted such high-profile cinematic productions as Tom Cruise's upcoming epic "The Last Samurai," Gwyneth Paltrow's "Sylvia," and Peter Jackson's "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" (the final installment of the Kiwi filmmaker's trilogy). Meanwhile, "Whale Rider," has gone on to international acclaim. Produced locally, it's about the coming of age of a Maori girl. Indigenous islanders, the Maoris continue to comprise a significant portion of New Zealand's population.

Filmmakers venture to these exotic islands for the same reason visitors do—New Zealand's dramatic and varied vistas. The island nation's scenery ranges from tropical in the north to alpine in the south. Between them, the two major islands have rugged snowcapped mountains, black-sand beaches, geothermal pools, lush river valleys, stark plains, and vast pasturelands. All of these wonders are packed into a country the size of Colorado. Whether they're in the mountains or in a vibrant metropolitan area, Kiwis are no more than seventy miles from the beach.

Edenic New Zealand's cinematic range also extends across centuries. Approximately two-thirds of "The Last Samurai" was filmed on the west coast of North Island over the course of several months. The Taranaki area on the west coast of North Island, the film's principal location, was turned into the Land of the Rising Sun. Mt. Taranaki, looming over a hilly region of green valleys, becomes an utterly convincing Mt. Fuji. The lakes, rivers, and snowfields of South Island were also used as locations.

Dunedin at the southern end of South Island is the setting for poet Sylvia Plath's

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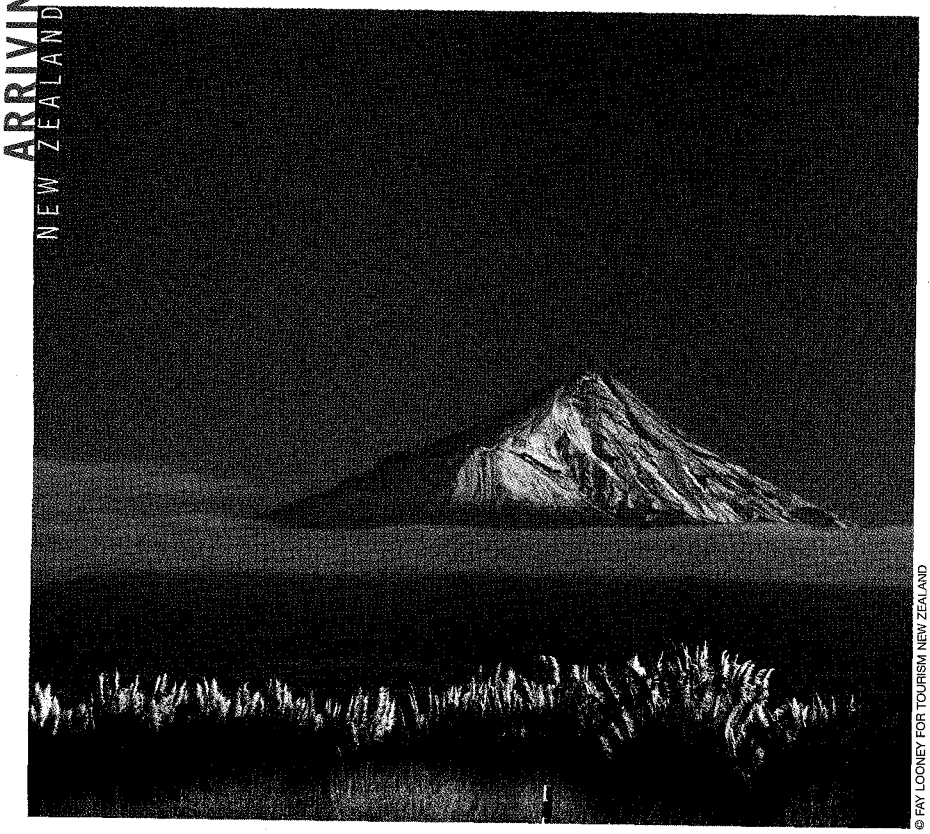

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years at Cambridge in "Sylvia." And Whangara near Gisborne on the east coast of North Island, a remote area with miles of unspoiled coastline, merely plays itself in the sensitive examination of Maori culture in "Whale Rider."

As moviegoers become more familiar with New Zealand's landscape, there are a growing number of tours to its film locations. Already the Japanese are lining up for tours to Mt. Taranaki. Plans are afoot to recreate battle scenes for these tour groups in a forest near Lake Mangamahoe.

"Lord of the Rings" tours are well established. Though the trilogy's sets were struck long ago, tours to the film locations are becoming popular. The breathtaking settings that attracted filmmakers in the first place have been restored to their original pristine condition. Ian Brodie's "The Lord of the Rings Location Guidebook" is the invaluable resource for finding and appreciating these sites. Currently sold only in Kiwi bookstores, it can also be purchased directly from the author at www.lordoftheringslocations.com.

With locations for "The Last Samurai," "Whale Rider," "The Piano," and the site of the Hobbit village in "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy at Matamata relatively close together, entrepreneurs are thinking of offering tours that will include all four films. In the meantime, plan your itinerary at www.newzealand.com.

No doubt in the coming years there will be a "King Kong" tour. Next year Peter Jackson will be directing a big-budget remake of the 1933 RKO Radio Pictures classic. Jackson will be shooting the film entirely on location in New Zealand—even its New York City shots. While the ape will once again make his fabled climb up the Empire State Building, most of what we'll see on the screen will be replicated in New Zealand with digital wizardry. To recreate "Skull Island," where much of the film takes place, the director will take full advantage of the country's abundance of secluded beaches and dense forests.

Anyone venturing to New Zealand to visit film locations will get more than they bargained for, predicts Wayne Stening, president of Newmans South Pacific Vacations. "While the scenery in the movie will impress viewers and create the motivation to travel to New Zealand, once here a visitor will discover so much more—the ancient Maori culture, the friendliness of the people, and the sophisticated wine and food scene."

FLY TO MIDDLE-EARTH

Air New Zealand deserves the moniker "Middle-earth Express." The most popular flight, Auckland to Queenstown, passes over such landmarks from the movie trilogy as Weathertop, the Rohan city of Edoras, the countryside surrounding Mordor, the Ithilien Woodlands, the Pillars of the Argonath, the Ford of Bruinen, the Dimrill Dale, and more.

Air New Zealand has seventeen weekly nonstop flights from their U.S. gateway at Los Angeles. East Coast residents connect using the U.S. airline's domestic partners, and there are also three flights each week from Honolulu to Auckland. Air New Zealand's 470 daily domestic flights frequently overfly film locations, and pilots routinely point them out.

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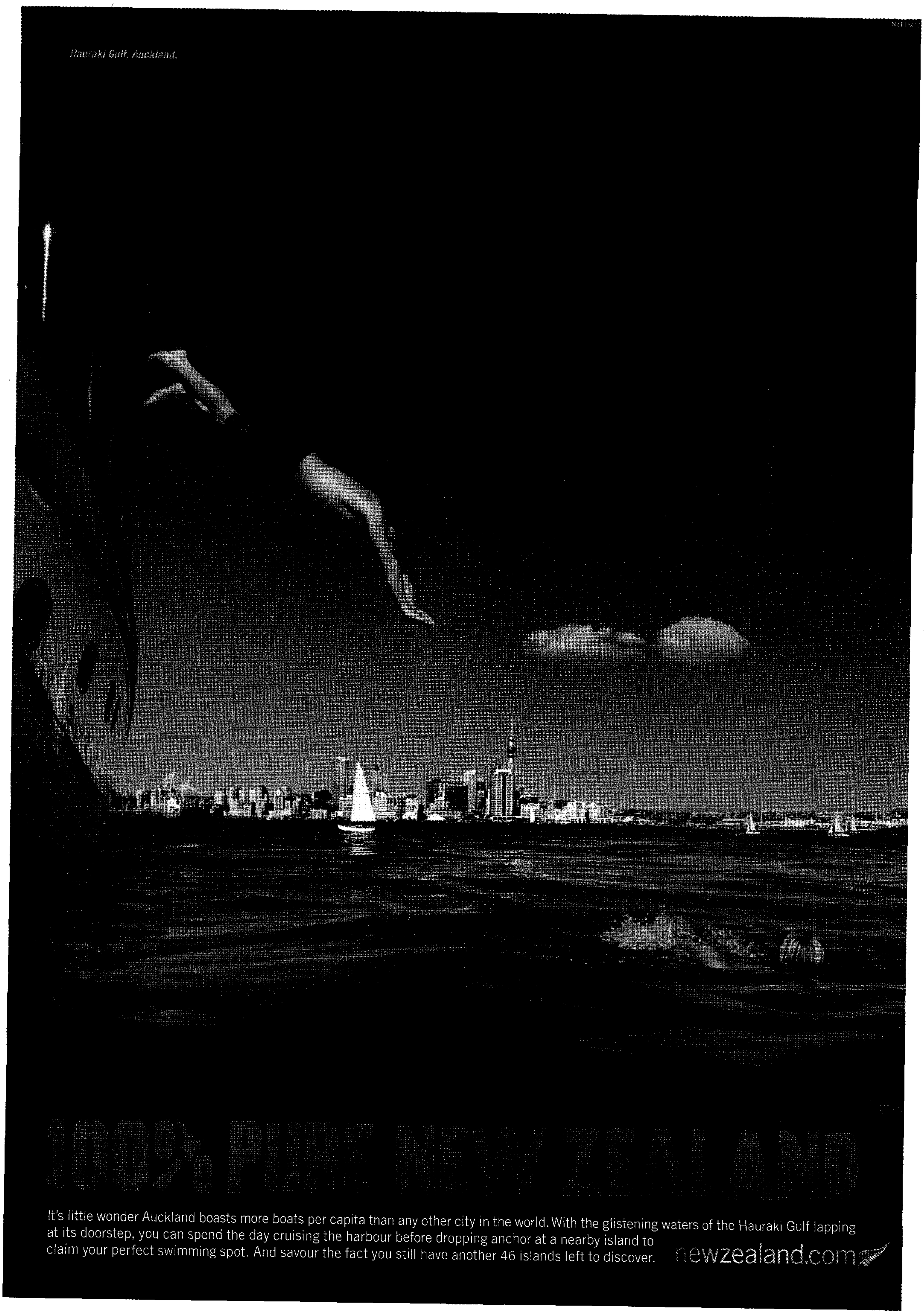
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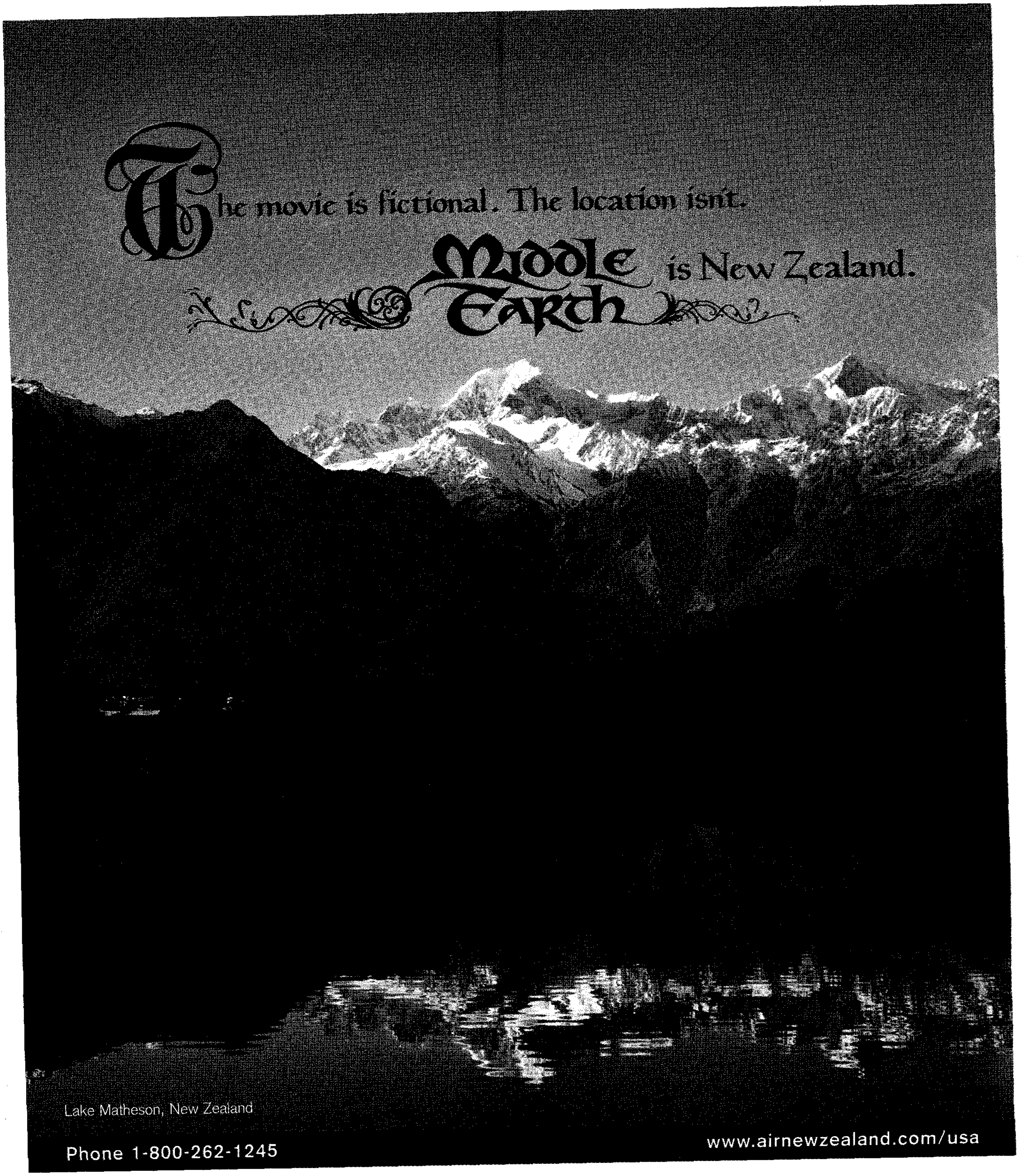
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lic knowledge of the multimillion-dollar fees paid to writers like Joe Eszterhas and Shane Black. Screenwriting began to look like the weak point in a wall standing between the people in the land of joy and self-fulfillment and the people outside, a perception that led, in time, to such courses as "The Magic of the Midpoint," which is being offered this month at Screenwriting Expo 2, a carnival for aspiring screenwriters, in Los Angeles.

In London, I asked McKee if he had ever thought of writing a novel. There was a long pause, then he nodded and said, "It's got a title: 'The Woman Who Tells Lies.' " Fifteen years ago, McKee began plotting a story about a successful woman writer who has run out of ideas. At lunch one day in a restaurant, she goes to find the bathroom, and passes a man who has collapsed by the cigarette machine: "He is a well-dressed, fifty-five-year-old professional man, and he is crying. She takes him to her table and calms him down and he tells her that he's looking for a woman whom he met ten years before. And he's been searching for her, he's come to this city searching for her. She says, 'I know this city like the back of my hand. I'll help you.' And then she gets on the phone and calls her editor, and says, 'I've got a book! This guy is a walking novel.' "

McKee motivates writers for a living, but he has not been able to get this book done. When I asked him why, he said, "It's a good question. Why haven't I? Fear is part of it. And I have created a life that is so demanding." He is writing "The Art of Darkness," a book about "the nature of writing from the dark side of life," and at the end of this year he is launching *The Writers' Quarterly*, a magazine that he will write himself for the first year. "And then I'll pull back on the lectures and the travel. I think I will pick up the novel again in about three years. I've got the whole plot, but I've got to clear space in my life."

McKee said that he never mentioned the novel to his family or his agent. I asked if the "Story" industry had been a kind of unconscious scheme to avoid writing "The Woman Who Tells Lies." He replied, "I'd say that. That would be honest." He added, "See, what I do is very seductive. On Sunday night, I'm going to get a standing ovation. I am an old actor and this is thirty hours of performance to a captive audience. It's very satisfying."

RIALTO
A BRIEF RESPITE BETWEEN THE SUMMER DELUGE OF BOTTOM-FEEDER CRAP AND THE WINTER DELUGE OF UPSCALE CRAP
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The next morning, in a lecture room at the Institution of Electrical Engineers, McKee took the stage without introduction or fanfare. Holding a coffee cup with his elbow locked into a right angle, he cleared his throat before making fierce announcements about the location of the restrooms and his policy of never answering questions from the floor. Like a wise political candidate, he presented himself as the reluctant outsider who had accepted the task of cleaning up a mess left by corrupt predecessors.

Hollywood makes five hundred films a year, "and the large percentage is perfect shit," McKee said, from a script that barely changes a word from one performance to another. In its search for material, Hollywood sets aside seven hundred and fifty million dollars a year in development budgets; most of this goes to writers. "And look what you get." McKee raised his eyebrows and took a stagy sip of coffee. "Look. What. You. Get." Since the end of its Golden Age—since about the time McKee began teaching—Hollywood has been so hungry for spectacle that it has come to neglect the fundamentals of storytelling, he said. B movies have become the new A movies. Those in his class who rediscovered the structure of stories, and understood that they are "metaphors for life," might enrich both themselves and the culture around them. "You must have real insight into human nature and society. . . . You must have an idea. . . . You must have talent." This is McKee's pitch: first, be born an artist. And then avoid clichés, but know that there are elements of deep, structural narrative that have been consistently satisfying through human history—in caveman stories, in Shakespeare, in "Snow White and the Three Stooges"—and that to work within this tradition is not to pander to corporate stupidity but, rather, to listen to the human soul.

"I'm not here to teach you how to write a Hollywood movie," McKee said, the scorn in his voice sending a wave of reassurance through his well-educated audience. But then he drew a triangle on an overhead projector slide: at the top was "Classical Design" (stories with causality, closed endings, linear time, an external conflict, a single, active protagonist); in the other corners he wrote "Minimalism" (open endings, passive protagonists) and "Anti-Structure" (co-

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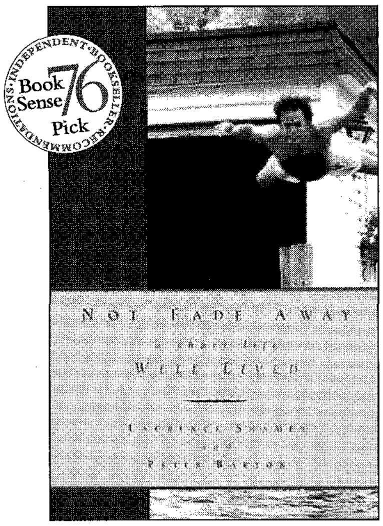
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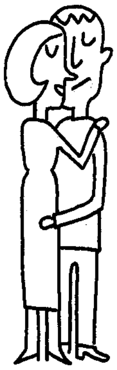
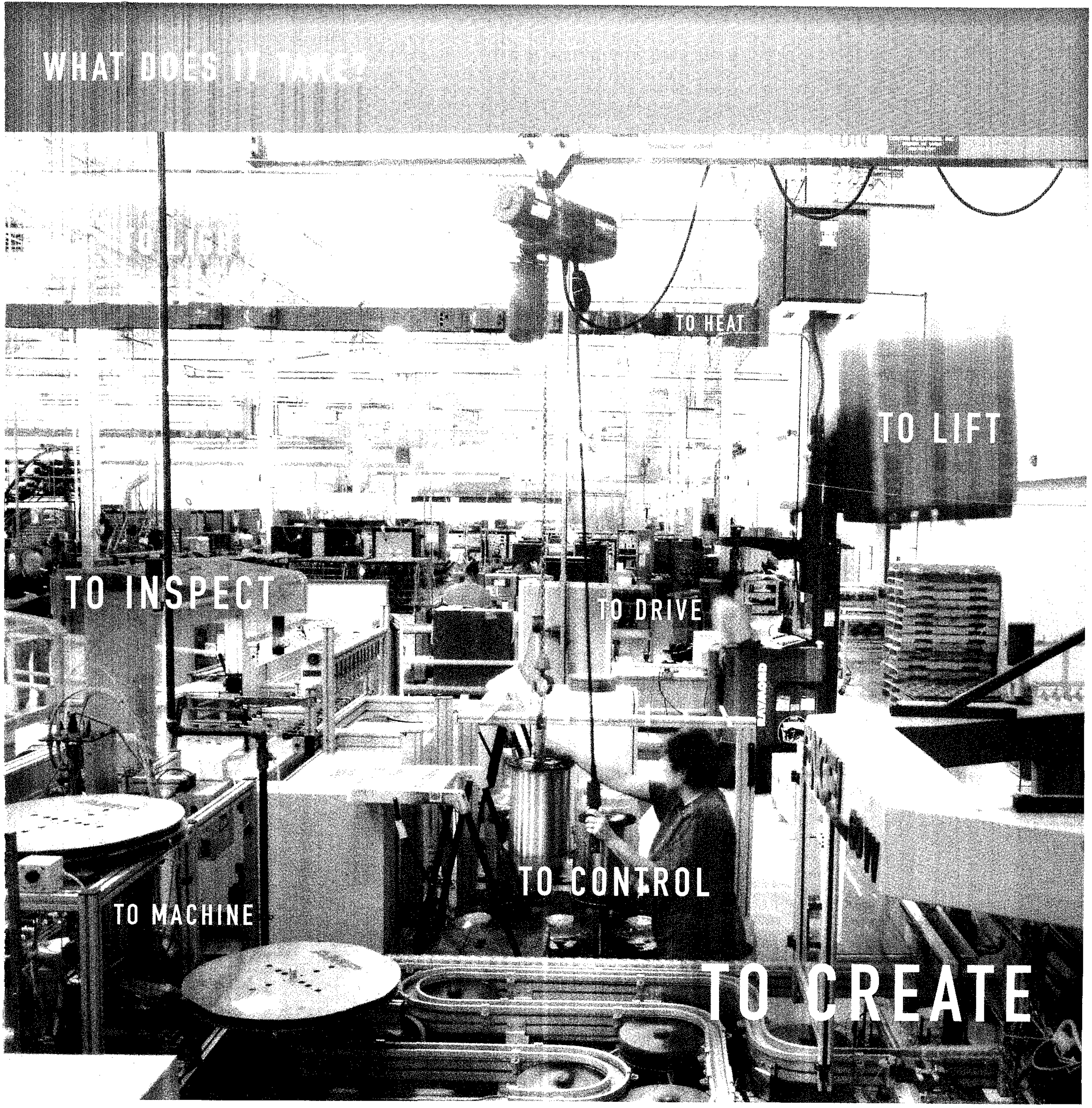
incidence, nonlinear time). "This course is about the top, about classical design," he said, pointing at the triangle. "Why? For your careers. As you move down the triangle, your audience shrinks. Why does it shrink? Because people see themselves as protagonists of their own lives. Classical design is a mirror of the human mind. It's how we see the world." McKee is a subversive who teaches tradition. He urges students to earn a living doing something intelligent near the top of the triangle—creating "worlds we've never seen but a humanity we all recognize"—but they need not feel that they have turned their backs on the avant-garde. They can get to that later: "Every great writer who found success launched his career at the top of the triangle: Bergman, Fellini, Godard."

In McKee's description, this is what a story is: a human being is living a life that is more or less in balance. Then comes the "inciting incident." (McKee borrows the phrase from "Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting," which was written in the late forties by John Howard Lawson, the first president of the Screen Writers Guild, and an inspiration to McKee.) The protagonist reacts, his life falls out of balance, and he now has had aroused in him a conscious or unconscious desire for whatever it is that will restore balance—"launching him on a quest for his object of desire against the forces of antagonism." McKee speaks some of these key phrases very fast, like a police officer reading a suspect his Miranda rights. "He may or may not achieve it."

Can his students achieve it? Can McKee? These are the dramas of the "Story" seminar. Pacing back and forth beneath portraits of Michael Faraday and Alexander Graham Bell, McKee spoke for three days about risk, jeopardy, desire, turning points, conflict, and choice—moving between his own life (most of it bad), the lives of his students, and the life of Rick in "Casablanca." He made close, clever readings of favorite movies ("Tender Mercies," "Carnal Knowledge"), and—uniting accounting and therapy—drew charts that showed lives zigzagging into emotional credit and debt in response to antagonistic forces. He screened "Casablanca" over six hours, and afterward (his shoes kicked aside) he reached an extraordinary crescendo of metaphysical, motivational talk (being and becoming, Schopenhauer and Derrida) that discovered in "As Time Goes By" the richness of a "Hamlet" monologue. He even sang the song, softly, to an audience that for a moment looked as if it had been caught on "Candid Camera."



There were also times, during the weekend, when McKee resembled nothing more than a man still talking, talking at the end of a cocktail party. McKee is an instinctive aggressor. When he talked about "The Art of Darkness"—a study of film noir, crime stories, and black comedy, seen in the context of human wickedness—he referred to "What Evil Means to Us," by C. Fred Alford, a political-science professor at the University of Maryland, whose thesis is that "doing evil is an attempt to transform the terrible passivity and helplessness of suffering into activity." Echoing Alford, McKee explained that "life is saturated with dread because you know you're going to die, and there's nothing you can do about it." (At this point, some in the audience wrote "going to die" in their notebooks.) "People who feel that in the extreme try to alleviate it by causing dread in other people." This gives them "the momentary sensation of having power over their own death." There were occasions when McKee might have been illuminating Alford's equation. After he had repeatedly heaped scorn on the indulgence of "The English Patient" and the clichés and vacant spectacle of "Titanic," a student who was a generation older than the others interrupted. "But they made money," he said, not out of love of these movies (he later told me in an e-mail) but to find out how McKee made sense of their success: are some resonant stories not metaphors for life? Or are the fans of "Titanic" leading lives that make lousy metaphors? He was hoping that McKee would discuss the power of commerce. Instead, McKee roared, "Do not interrupt me!" The student, an academic with twenty-five years of teaching experience, was struck silent. "I kept my eyes on the stage and said nothing," he recalled.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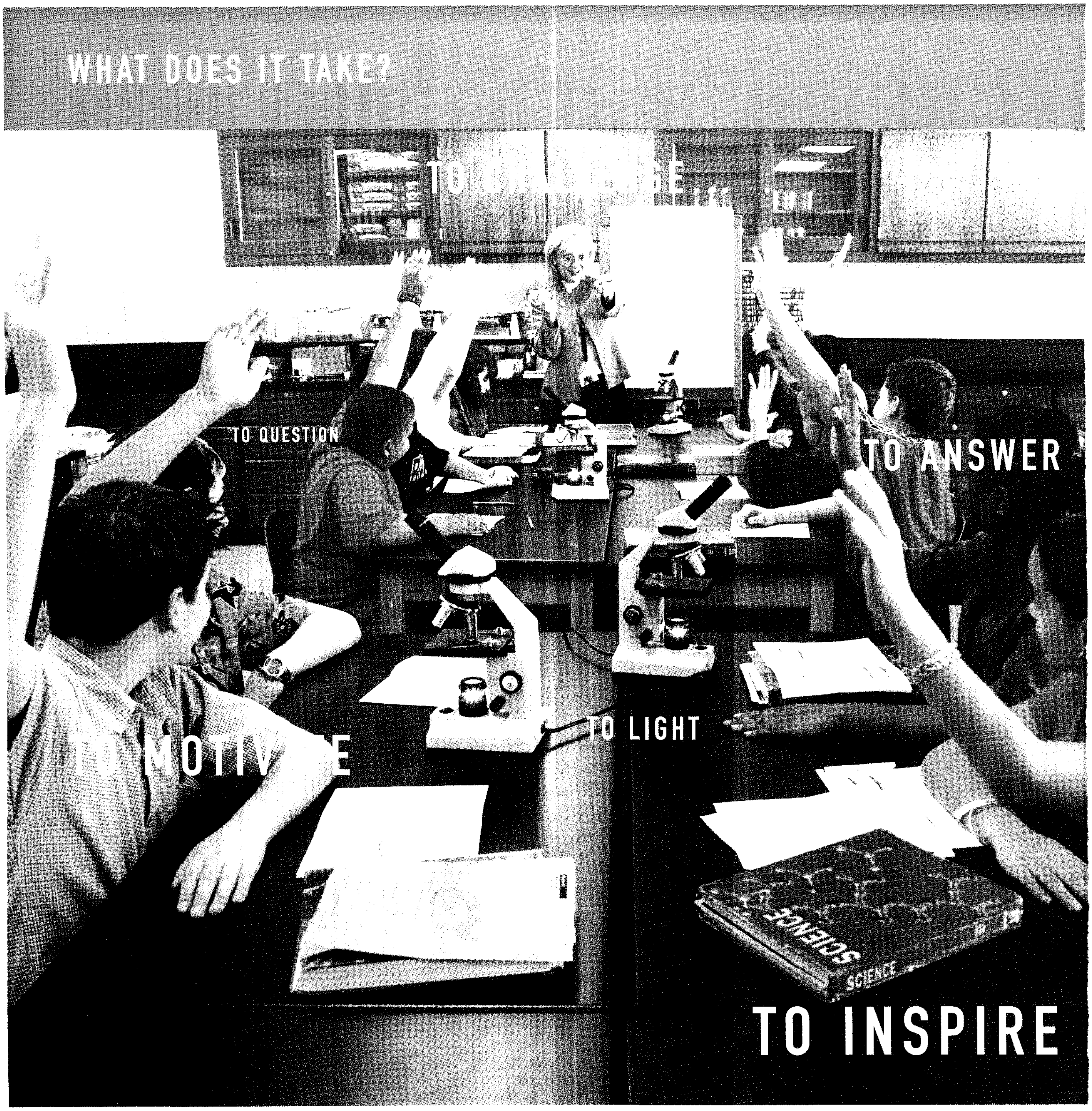
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"My stomach was churning, I was overcome with embarrassment and fear." McKee cried, "If you think that this course is about making money, there's the door!" He pointed an Old Testament finger, and seemed to be enjoying himself.

A few weeks ago, I visited McKee in Bel Air, at the home, a mile or so north of Sunset Boulevard, that he shares with his third wife, Suzanne Childs, who was a high-profile spokeswoman for the Los Angeles District Attorney's office during the Menendez and O. J. Simpson trials, and who now runs the L.A.D.A.'s Victim-Witness Assistance Program. (Childs, who was married to Michael Crichton in the eighties, met McKee at a "Story" seminar.) They live on the steep side of a canyon in a single-story home—not a show-business mansion—that has an easy, seventies feel to it. On a low table in McKee's office, a dozen translations of "Story" were stacked alongside a plaque commemorating a hole in one he'd made at his local golf course. Books and articles—"The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness," and many similar titles—that McKee was reading for "The Art of Darkness" were lined up by his desk. He showed me the index cards that he fills in every time he gets back from the movies. " 'Swimming Pool': Bergman's 'Persona' without the genius." " 'The Secret Lives of Dentists': Shrug about a guy who just wants peace and routine." " 'Finding Nemo': Good adventure with at least six rescues at the end—everyone takes turns rescuing everyone else." Outside, on the terrace, McKee has a southwesterly view that on a good day stretches to Santa Catalina Island, sixty miles away, and here we sat on wicker chairs while McKee smoked steadily.

"I discovered this enormous hunger for what I thought was common sense, common knowledge," he said, contemplating his career as itinerant adult educator. "I'm repeating what I was taught, and then adding some little insights I'd had—but basically recycling Kenneth Rowe and John Howard Lawson and Aristotle, and putting it in a contemporary context for these people. I'm putting the obvious into a new context, and I see their slack-jawed, wide-

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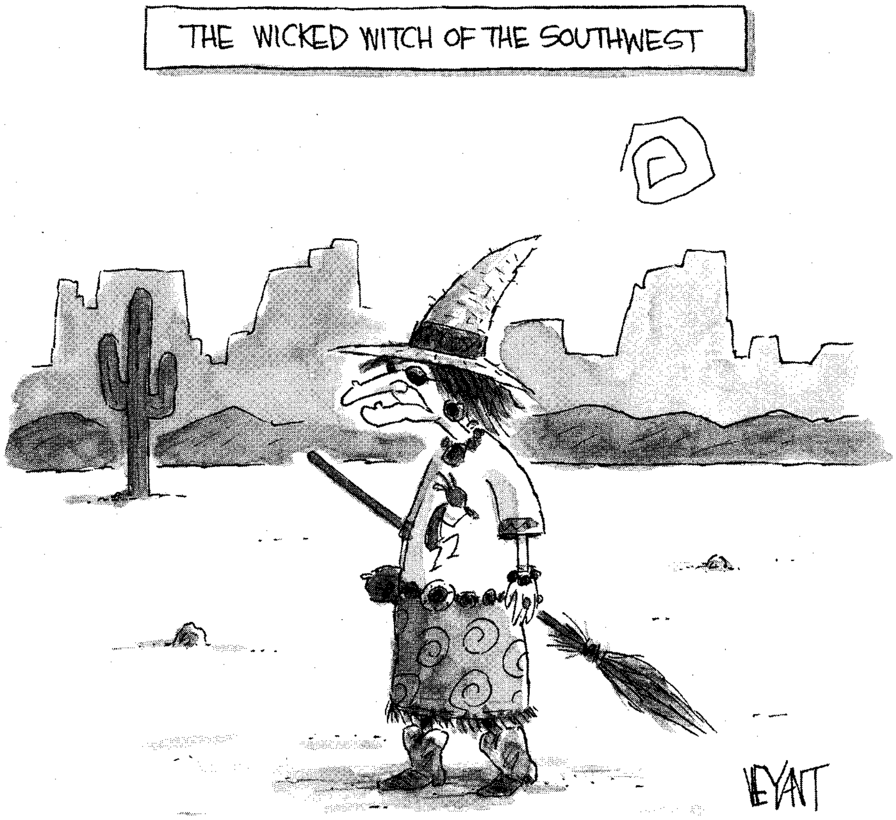
eyed look, and their tremendous hunger to know what I knew. It's obviously needed. I can see the emptiness out there."

The critic Barbara Hardy wrote in 1968 that "we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative." Alasdair MacIntyre, the philosopher, quotes Hardy in his book "After Virtue," and then continues, "Stories are lived before they are told. . . . And to someone who says that in life there are no endings, or that final partings take place only in stories, one is tempted to reply, 'But have you never heard of death?' " McKee seems persuaded that real life has the shape of a story—there are third acts, even if they may have a second-act air about them. "Yes, there are turning points, and points when the curtain comes down—ta-da!—then the thing starts again." For all McKee's gloom, and his love of stories in which grown men cry (the category includes "Casablanca," "Tender Mercies," and his own unwritten novel), he is driven by a kind of melancholy optimism: "Hopefully, you can live in a way so that you can die with the notion that, on balance, the sense of achievement outweighs the regret."

Whatever McKee's day-to-day influence is on Hollywood screenwriting—I heard one young producer wonder if all screenplay guidance exists primarily to give executives a scientific, salary-justifying language of script criticism and script rejection—he knows his teaching has a powerful subtext. "The students realize that it's their life I'm talking about: it's out of balance, they're struggling to put it into balance," he said. "How are they going to do it? They have conceived of that object, that something, that if they could get it, would restore the balance of their life. Now, for the character, it could be that he needs to right the injustice that was done to his family; it could be to find something worth living for to get him up in the morning. Right? But for the students it's a successful piece of writing. And until they achieve a successful piece of writing, their lives will be perpetually out of balance."

In the movies of our own lives, McKee argues, we can take the role of protagonist. ("Have you ever been in love?" he asks. "The day you met that person, that was an inciting incident.") But three years ago, when McKee was sent Charlie Kaufman's screenplay for "Adaptation," he had a glimpse of another possible (and gloomier) truth: that in the movies of other people's lives we are lucky to get anything better than the role of a character actor, who, with a bundle of evident virtues and vices, bounces for a moment or two off the protagonist. "I got this phone call in the middle of the day from New York, a very embarrassed producer," McKee remembered. "He said, 'This is the most embarrassing phone call I've ever had to make. I don't know how to say this, but there's this guy Charlie Kaufman, who did 'Being John Malkovich,' and he's written this new screenplay, and he's quoted freely from your book and lecture without copyright permission, and we don't know what to do." He needed McKee's permission. McKee read the script, and asked the opinion of two people: one was his friend William Goldman, the screenwriter and author of "Adventures in the Screen Trade." "Don't do it," Goldman said. "Don't fucking do it. It's Hollywood, and you can't trust them." McKee then called his son, Paul, who is twenty-five. "He said, 'Do it.' I said, 'But suppose they make fun of me?' He said, 'Dad, you're going to be a character in a Hollywood film.' "


THE WICKED WITCH OF THE SOUTHWEST

McKee asked for two changes to the script. He wanted a "redeeming scene," and he was given it: an Obi-Wan Kenobi moment, in a bar, between his character and the Charlie Kaufman character. McKee also wanted a better ending. Although McKee does not quite see it this way, the joke of "Adaptation" 's final scenes is that, after Charlie Kaufman hears McKee lecture, the impulses of dumb blockbuster writing—sex and murder—take over the movie. McKee says that, in real life, he was trying to fix it. "I said, 'Before I can consent, we have to have meetings.' You have serious third-act problems.' " McKee laughed—a loud "ha!"—remembering that in earlier versions there was a character called the Swamp Ape, "who came roaring out of the swamp and killed the Chris Cooper character." McKee killed the Swamp Ape. As he told "Adaptation" 's producers, echoing the hope of redemption that runs through the heads of McKee's "Story" students, "I cannot be a character in a bad movie. I can't be." ♦

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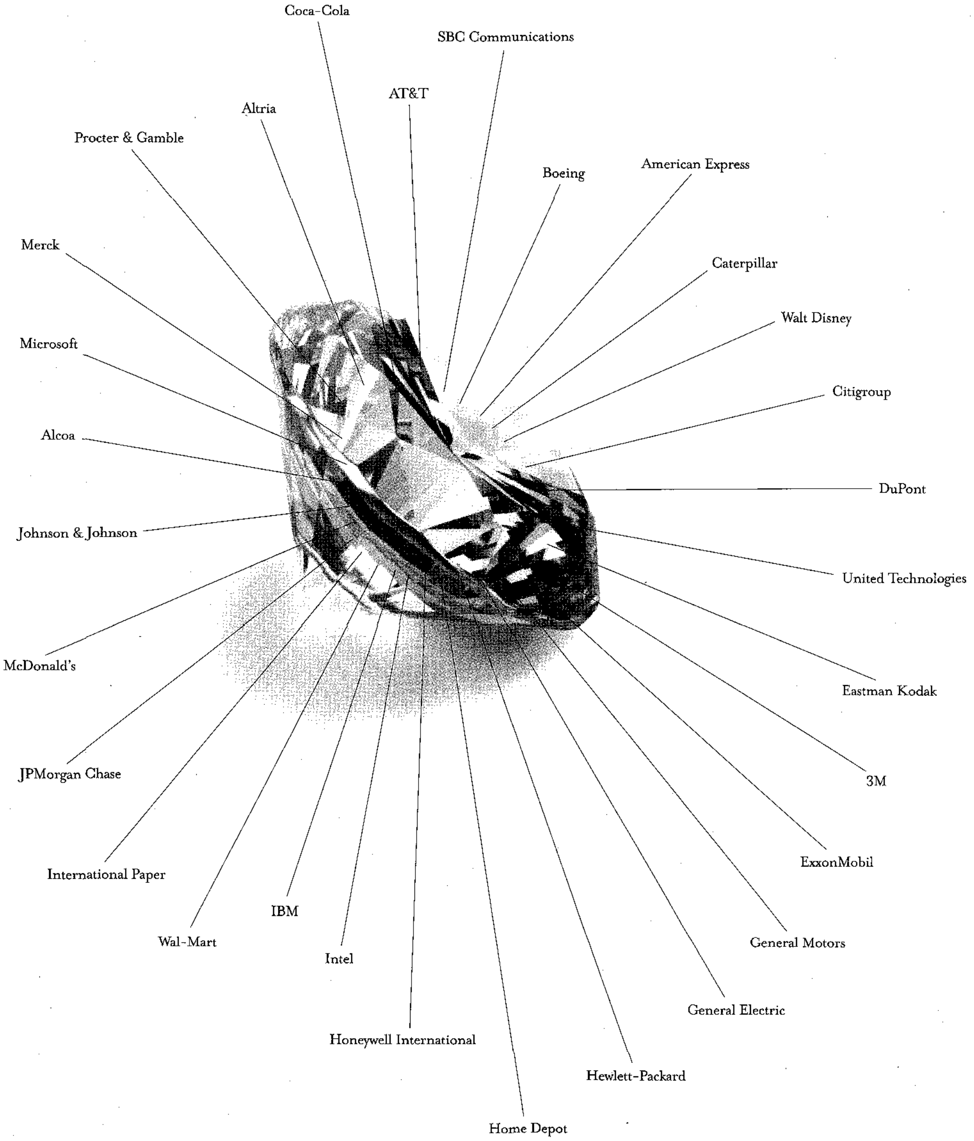
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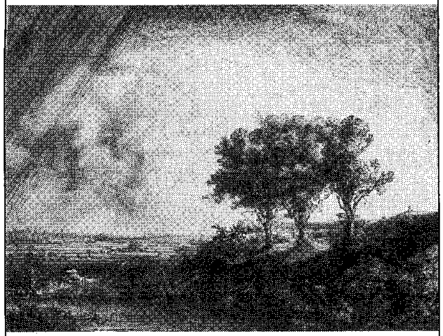

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ANNALS OF ACTING

THE ALMOST IT GIRL

Brittany, Reese, Kate—what have they got that she hasn't got?

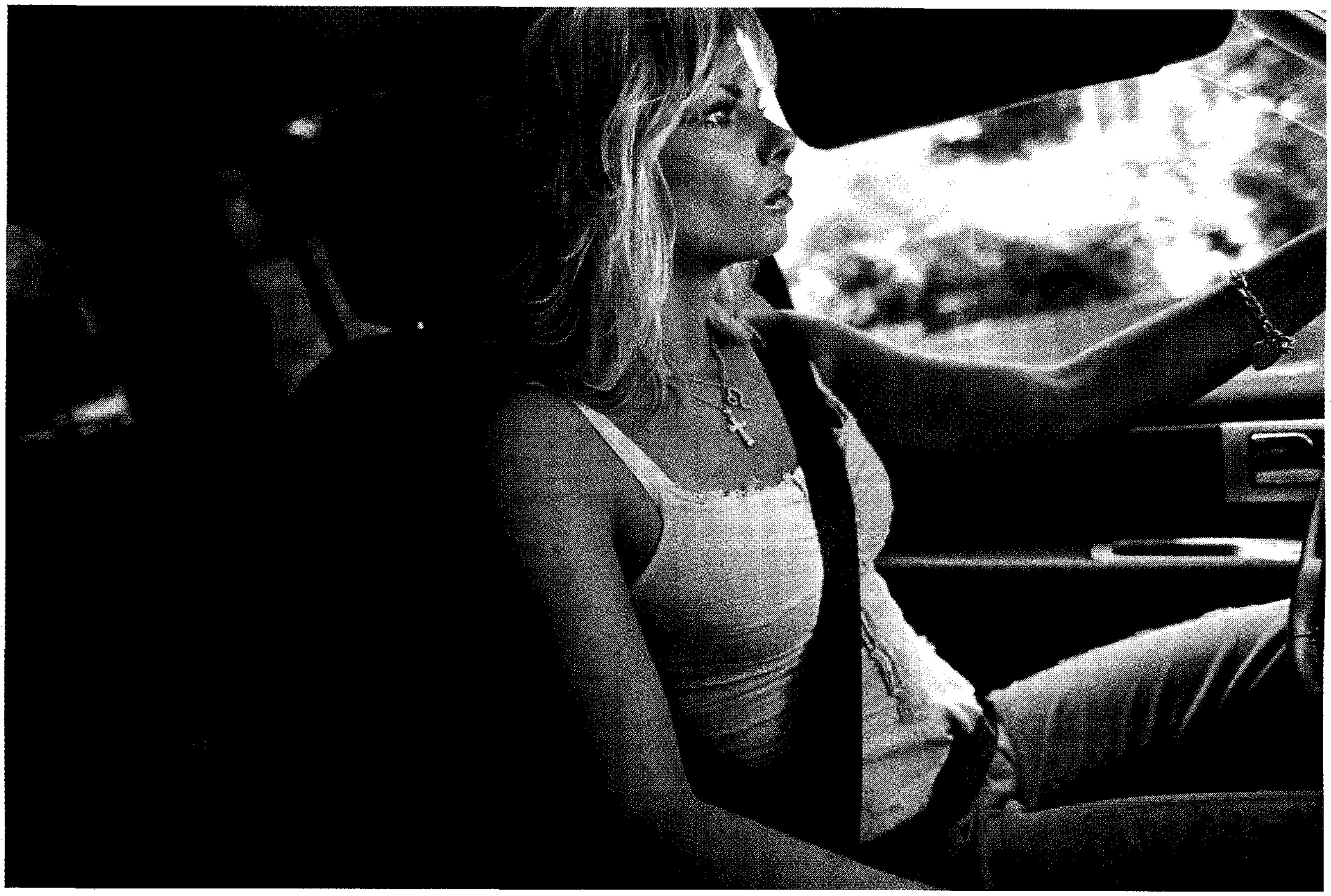
BY REBECCA MEAD

Jaime Pressly would like to see her name in lights, and, when that happens, she would like it to be spelled correctly. Pressly, who is twenty-six, is a movie actress of considerable ambition and charm and moderate professional success. She has, in the past six years, appeared in nineteen movies, of which only ten have had a theatrical release in the United States. She also spent two years on "Jack & Jill," a sitcom on the WB network. The majority of her movies—among the most recent are such titles as "The Karate Dog" and "Demon Island"—have been greeted with, at best, critical indifference and, more often, critical disdain, although in some cases they have also achieved box-office success. None of them have established Pressly as a household name, not even in the households of the production teams with which she has worked: on all but one of Pressly's movie sets, the canvas-backed folding chair assigned for her use between shots has borne an egregiously misspelled version of her name—Jamie Pressly, Jaime Presley, or some other equally irritating permutation.

Pressly inherited her name from her father, James Liston Pressly, who is a car salesman in Kinston, North Carolina, where Jaime spent her earliest years. From him she also inherited her full lips and blond hair, while from her mom she gets her eyes, which are huge, wide-set, and of the crystalline blue that toy manufacturers choose for their prettiest dolls. She has, thanks to many childhood hours devoted to dance classes, gymnastics lessons, and cheerleading practice, and to the endowment of nature, a physique of unusual grace and shapeliness. Pressly has a quick wit and a salty, demotic tongue, and she can be impatient with minds more slow-moving than her own, particularly when they belong to her personal assistant or others who work in her orbit.

She has most typically been cast on the strength of her looks and her Southern sassiness, rather than in the expectation that she will demonstrate transformative dramatic powers. She has had girlfriend roles in forgettable teensploitation flicks, among them "One Hundred Girls," "Tomcats," and "Can't Hardly Wait." She has been cast in secondary roles alongside some well-known actors, including Steven Seagal and Dennis Hopper—in "Ticker," an action film in which she got to scowl and do her own stunt fighting—and David Spade, in whose roundly panned gross-out flick "Joe Dirt" Pressly played a girl who may or may not turn out to be Spade's sister but becomes, in the meantime, his sexual partner. Brighter moments have been a brief but winning performance as a maniacally perky cheerleader in the scatological parody "Not Another Teen Movie" and a starring role in "Ringmaster," a Jerry Springer vehicle in which she played a motel maid who appears as a guest on a Springer episode entitled "Sleeping with Her Stepfather." For "Torque," a biker movie starring Ice Cube which is to be released by Warner Bros. in January, Pressly plays what its director, Joseph Kahn, describes as "the bad girl with a capital 'B.' I kept her like a feral animal. She doesn't speak—she just runs around killing people."

In an earlier era, when Hollywood was as yet unembarrassed by its pervasive depreciation of women, Pressly would have been called a starlet—one of those multitudinous young women whom the studios groomed and kept on their rosters and from whose ranks true stars would occasionally, through a coincidence of talent and luck, emerge. The transformation of starlet to star is one of Hollywood's favorite narratives about itself, and classic movies, including "A Star Is Born" and "All About Eve," have been built around the premise. But the more typical starlet story is one like Jaime Pressly's, in which the actress progresses, inch by inch, through years of hard work, from playing the girlfriend of a minor character to playing a minor character herself, and then to scoring a role as a secondary lead in a genre film, all the while watching the reserves of competitors being replenished by new, younger talent. The life cycle of a starlet, like that of a gymnast or a figure skater, is a short one, and though some actresses do break through—Sharon Stone put in years as a sexy blonde on the sidelines before she became a real movie star—most are obsolete before they have had a chance to render themselves essential.



Jaime Pressly says of the limitations of her career: "I got offered roles to be the head jock's hot girlfriend." Photograph by Thomas Kern.

No one could be wearier of the limitations of Pressly's œuvre than Pressly herself, and while she declares that she is proud of all that she has accomplished—a million-dollar-plus house in the hills above Studio City, a track record of consistent employment—she is impatient for the chance to prove herself capable of more. "I don't get the part of the girl who cries when her husband leaves her, because they believe that I would kick *his* ass—he wouldn't kick mine," she said one day. "I'd love to play a drug addict, or a complete lost soul. I'd love to play *anything* else." Nobody asked Pressly to read for "Girl, Interrupted," she said later. "Everyone assumes I can't be vulnerable. I can be just as fricking vulnerable as anybody else."

Pressly has seen members of her cohort, such as Brittany Murphy and Eva Mendes, exchange the role of semi-anonymous starlet for that of bona-fide star, migrating from the paparazzi pages to the feature pages of *People*. Other actresses of Pressly's generation, such as Reese Witherspoon, are in another realm altogether, one where directors behave like courtiers and even the most complicated names are never misspelled.

One recent morning, Pressly, filled with annoyance, climbed into her car, a black Navigator. One of her two managers, Lena Roklin, with whom she has worked for eight years, had scheduled an audition for the part of the wife in "Mask 2," and Pressly was not convinced that this was a role she should seek, since the star of "Mask," Jim Carrey, was to be replaced by a much less well-known actor, Jamie Kennedy.

"Lena is, like, 'You haven't done a studio film in a year,' " Pressly grumbled. "I said, 'You wanted me to do independent films.' And she said, 'Yeah, but you can't do *all* independent films.' So I go, 'Either way, I am wrong here, Lena.' And she goes, 'No, you have to be part of *all* of it.' " Pressly had not had time to prepare for the audition, but Roklin had insisted that it had to happen today, and Pressly was planning to learn her lines when she got to her office, in a strip mall on Ventura Boulevard. As she pulled into her parking spot, outside the car-leasing company from which she rents space, Pressly's cell phone rang; it was Roklin, telling her that the audition time had been moved up.

"I am not fucking ready to go in and read, Lena!" Pressly, her hands on the wheel, yelled into her overhead microphone.

"Whenever you read, you're a total pro," Roklin said in a conciliatory tone.

"You have to talk to them," Pressly

said urgently. "I don't know these lines."

"Why didn't you study last night?" Roklin said, more coldly.

"I did look at them last night," Pressly said. "I did it at one in the fucking morning." Pressly hung up on Roklin, marched into her office, and sat down at her assistant's desk to go over her lines, in which her character tries to convince Jamie Kennedy that it's time for them to start a family. " 'My biological clock is *ticking* here!' " Pressly read in an agitated voice, then read the line again, more plaintively. She scanned the rest of the page. "Oh good, I get to cry here," she said. "That should be easy enough today."

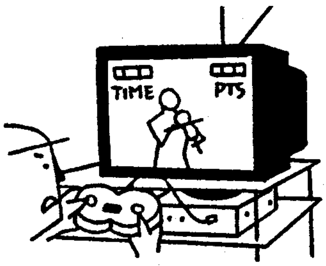
After five minutes of study, Pressly headed off to Culver City with low expectations. "It always comes down to whether or not I look like the girl they had in mind, because it's not that I can't play the role," she said. She wasn't even sure whom she was reading for, and shuffled through her papers for the director's name. "Larry Gutterman," she said. "Never fucking heard of him. But then I am bad with names."

On the way to the studio, Pressly passed a billboard for "Uptown Girls," the comedy starring Brittany Murphy, whose name recognition has, in recent months, edged toward that of Britney Spears, thanks to well-chosen roles and a highly publicized breakup with Ashton Kutcher. "I really admire Brittany Murphy," Pressly said. "She's working her ass off, and she's a great actress. I'm very different from her. I'm boisterous, and I voice my opinion. I have a brain. Of course, she does, too—she is extremely intelligent. I just mean that I am somebody who doesn't sit back and put up with a bunch of bullshit. I would rather be involved one hundred per cent than have other people run my life completely, not knowing my head from my ass."

Every young, hungry actress wonders what it is the girl on the billboard has that she doesn't have—a better agent? a prettier face?—and the pressure for self-improvement, whether it takes the form of trading up to a different agency or undergoing liposuction, is intense. Pressly herself has had no surgery, though she does not rule it out, and has considered botoxing her forehead between her eyes. "I get a crease there, and it can make me look harsh," she says. "But it gives me character, and when you get botoxed you have no emotion on your face." She laughed grimly and said, "Maybe that's what I need to do to make people think I'm vulnerable. I need to be botoxed into vulnerability."

After driving for half an hour, Pressly had reached Beverly Boulevard, and was minutes away from her "Mask 2" appointment, when her cell phone rang again. It was Tim Taylor, her other manager. "It's not that you're late or anything, but they have to run out the door," he said. "They want to reschedule." Pressly, too annoyed even to curse into the phone, simply bowed her head toward the steering wheel and hauled the car back around toward Studio City. "This morning, they said they couldn't reschedule, because this was the last day," she said. "Don't lie to me that there isn't another day. There's always another day."

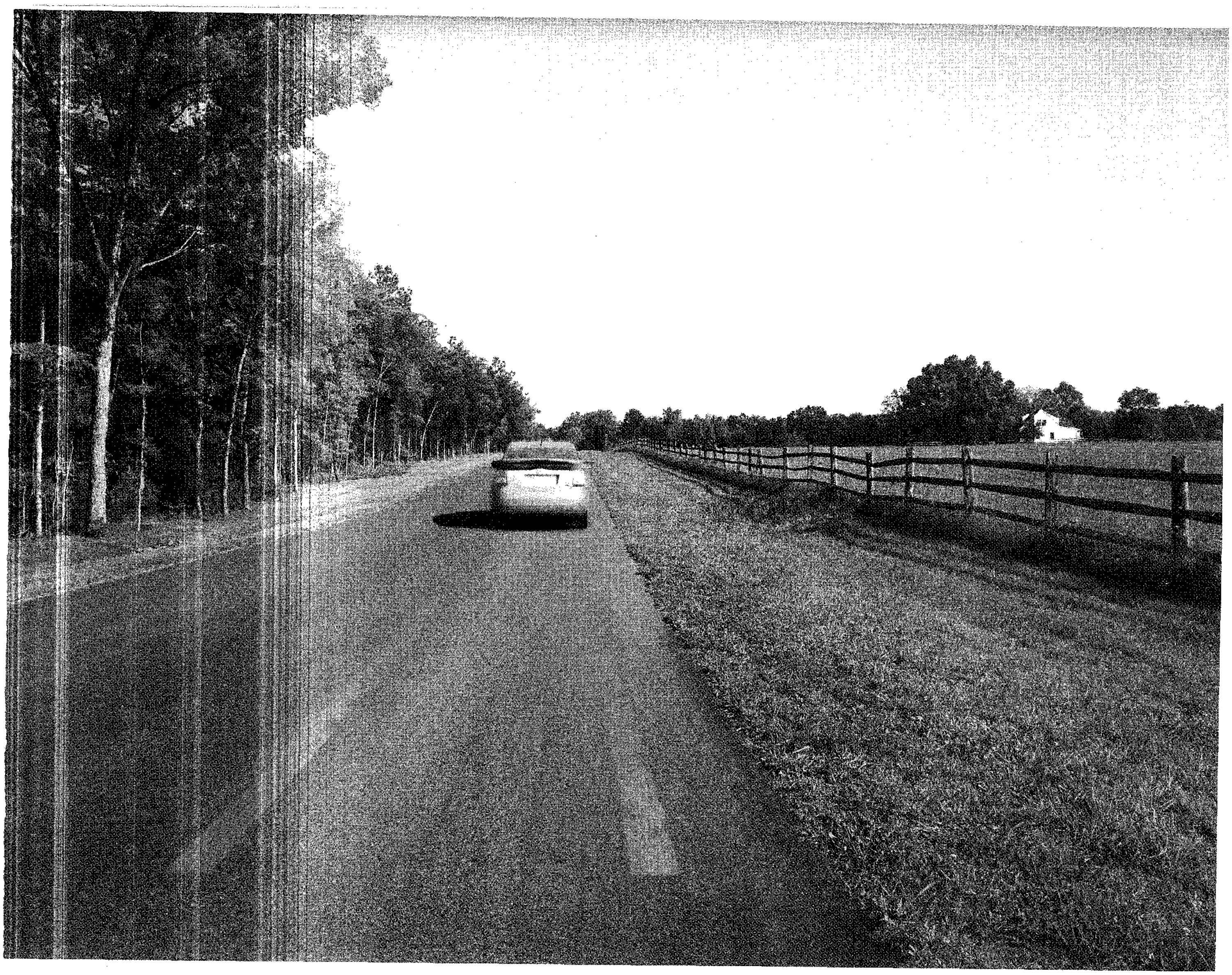
In contrast to more earthbound pursuits, the business of becoming a movie star is haphazard: there are no exams to pass, no internships to enroll in, no automatic privileges of seniority or experience. The course of an actress's career will be shaped in large part by which roles she is offered and which of them she chooses to accept. One school of thought holds that a would-be star should be prepared to do anything for the sake of hearing the smart snap of the clapperboard, since appearing even in a mediocre film that makes money increases an actor's bankability for less mediocre films. The other school of thought holds that being associated with schlock leads only deeper into schlockdom. Pressly, at the urging of her managers, has taken the more catholic approach, and as a result she has repeatedly played bad girls in bad films. Her movie début was the third and final installment in the "Poison Ivy" series, "Poison Ivy: The New Seduction," in which she played Violet, a deceptively winning young woman who, having resorted to a career as a professional dominatrix after being wronged as a child by a wealthy family, wreaks an elaborate revenge that would be categorized clinically as psychotic and cinematically as camp. (The studly boyfriend of Violet's alleged best friend, on seeing Violet, just home from work, in leather bodice and garter belt: "Where did you say you worked again?" Violet, archly: "Denny's. In Hollywood. It's under new management." Studly boyfriend, bewildered: "I guess I've never eaten there before." Violet, straddling the piano bench on which she is sitting: "Would you like to?")



Subsequently, other directors, impressed by Pressly's talent for unzipping a gown and stepping out of it, cast her in part after part that required her less to act than simply to be. Even when Pressly played the motel maid in "Ringmaster," the first role in which her character was deliberately rather than accidentally comic, her first scene involved performing bored fellatio on a random motel guest. "People look at this face and this body, even if I wear a turtleneck and jeans—I can't help it," she said. "While people look at Brittany Murphy and go, 'Wow, she's a great actress.' "

Pressly knows that she bears some responsibility for the way directors and casting agents perceive her. When "Poison Ivy: The New Seduction" came out, she posed for *Playboy*, and she has also stripped down to underpants and a pair of strategically crossed arms for the cover of *Maxim*. "Part of the way I am seen is my fault because of doing *Playboy*, or whatever," she says. "But, at the end of the day, I don't have a problem with nudity. And, if you do, that's your problem." Other actresses have transcended similar origins: Kim Basinger began her career by posing for *Playboy* and starring in the made-for-TV movie "Katie: Portrait of a Centerfold," and she still got to appear in "L.A. Confidential." And Jamie Lee Curtis appeared topless in "Trading Places." Pressly knows, however, that her decision has its drawbacks. "Brittany never did nude things," she said. "Brittany never did a bad film. She got offered different films. I got offered roles to be the head jock's hot girlfriend."

Tim Taylor says, "Once she gets her



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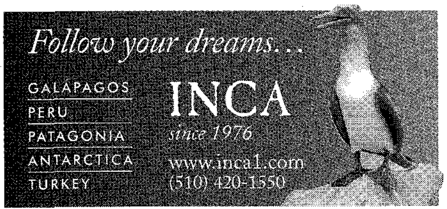
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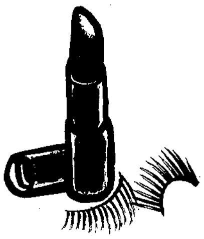
'Monster's Ball,' she's there." Getting one's "Monster's Ball," however, is a trick not easily accomplished, especially when you are the kind of actress who comes most readily to a casting director's mind when he is trying to plug the holes left by departing talent in "Monster's Ball 2" or "3." Pressly recently auditioned for a role in "Blade 3," which, like "Blades 1" and "2," stars Wesley Snipes. "Originally, I went in for the lead good girl, but the director wanted me to read for the lead bad girl," she said. "I said, 'I don't mean to be difficult, but I have no desire to play any more bad girls.' He said, 'But you're so damn *good* at playing the bad girl.' I said, 'Well, you've seen me do it before,' and he said, 'Not in this big a role.' " She decided it was worth a try: "The thing is, she speaks more than the lead good girl does."



Even when Pressly takes a role she's not thrilled by just because it's in a big-budget studio movie, there is no guarantee that it will be released on schedule. "Torque" was due to be released last March but was delayed until October, and then January, which means that Pressly will have had to wait nearly a year for the infusion of publicity upon which her career depends. Pressly is a sophisticated reader of magazines, which she treats not as entertainment but as a sphere of influence that she must navigate skillfully. "You have got to get press any way you can, until you've made enough of a name for yourself that you're doing films that are going to be in *Glamour*," she says. "You might get a page in *Rolling Stone*, or one of the alternative magazines, but you're not going to get in *Vogue* or *Glamour* or *Elle* doing 'Torque.' "

Pressly has not received much press attention lately, not just because of the delayed release of "Torque" but because prior to filming that movie she took a year off, saying that she was burned out. She does not have an agent at the moment, having left I.C.M., where she had been, four months ago. She does, however, have a team, which, in addition to her managers, consists of her personal assistant, a business manager, a lawyer, two publicists, a personal trainer, and a hairdresser and makeup artist whom she always uses for public appearances.

She has not been idle while waiting for "Torque" to be released; neither has she been broke. In the spring, she signed an exclusive contract with NBC, resulting in a pilot for a sitcom produced by Kelsey Grammar which she describes as " 'Cheers' but in a small Southern fishing community," and which the network declined to pick up. She also took over Alyssa Milano's role as the MCI Angel in the 1-800 commercials, which required her to wear a tight white satin suit and wings.

More artistically rewarding if less lucrative was a role in an independent film, "Death to the Supermodel," which Pressly made this fall in Costa Rica. In it she plays the nerdy editor of an ailing magazine who decides to rev up her publication's ratings by shooting the world's top supermodels. "She's like Reese Witherspoon's character in 'Election' but dorkier," Pressly explained. In the movie, Pressly, in a lapse of publishing verisimilitude, strips down to a bathing suit and performs a synchronized-swimming routine.

In order to learn the moves, she took a synchronized-swimming lesson one afternoon from a teacher who was sturdily built, wore a sensible one-piece suit, and had sunblock slathered all over her face. Pressly slid into the water in a skimpy red-and-white striped bikini. "I've been a dancer my whole life," Pressly said, confidently. "It's going to be harder than you think," her teacher said. Soon, Pressly was working strenuously, circling her arms in the air while attempting to master the art of "egg-beater legs"—which involves frantically thrashing one's legs under the water while the upper half of the body bobs above the waterline. Pressly lost her balance and disappeared underwater. "It needs to be a bit more Esther Williamsy," her teacher said, and demonstrated a technique for jumping high out of the water at the routine's finale; Pressly, determined to succeed, sprung up from the depths with such force that her bikini top dislodged. "That had better not happen in front of the crew," she said as she busily restored her dignity.

Another difference between Pressly's character in "Death to the Supermodel" and Tracy Flick, the overachieving high-school student that Reese Witherspoon plays in "Election," is that, while Flick's secret ambition is to become President of the United States, the private longing of Pressly's character is to be a supermodel. The gulf between those ambitions is the gap between the careers of Witherspoon, every director's favorite young actress from the South, and Pressly, who appeared not only in "Trash" but in "Poor White Trash." Pressly also wonders whether the other actress's path is her own road not taken. "I have a lot of respect for Reese and Ryan," Pressly said, referring to Ryan Phillippe, Witherspoon's husband, who is also an actor. "They are managing to have a good, old-fashioned Southern life. But, then again, she didn't do 'Poison Ivy 3.' "

Pressly often attracts stares from people who, though they may not recognize her, do recognize the nimbus of celebrity that surrounds her. One of the most perplexing questions Pressly is asked is "Are you *somebody*?" "It's a trick question," she says. "If you say 'Yes, as a matter of fact I am,' you are stuck-up. If you say no, then you're saying, 'I'm nobody special.' It screws you either way."

The extent to which Pressly is somebody varies according to context. In Hollywood parlance, she is a name, but other people are much bigger names than she is. Recently, she was asked to audition as the replacement for Lisa Robin Kelly, an actress on the television series "That 70's Show." Pressly had misgivings about the enterprise. "When I went into the room to read, I was the only name there," she said. "I had been told they were looking for a name, but no name is going to want to go and fill the shoes of someone else."

While working hard to become a name, Pressly has had to witness the rather galling success of actresses who were, in a manner of speaking, born names. "Don't get me wrong, I adore Kate Hudson—I think she's precious, and just like her mother," Pressly says. Hudson is the daughter of Goldie Hawn. "But had she not been her mother's daughter would she have been given 'Almost Famous' for her first role? Probably not." Gwyneth Paltrow, Pressly believes, has also been blessed with familial advantages. "She's a great actress, but it's hard when you look at somebody who had it so much easier," Pressly says.

Pressly comes from more humble theatrical origins: her mother ran a dance studio in Kinston, and Pressly started taking classes at the age of three. Her parents separated when she was in her early teens, at which point she and her mother moved from North Carolina to Orange County. Pressly dropped out of school to follow a modelling career—her first job was shooting the cover of *Teen* magazine—and, unhappy with the domestic regulations enforced by the man who later became her stepfather, left home at fifteen. She became legally emancipated from her parents in order to spend two unchaperoned months work-

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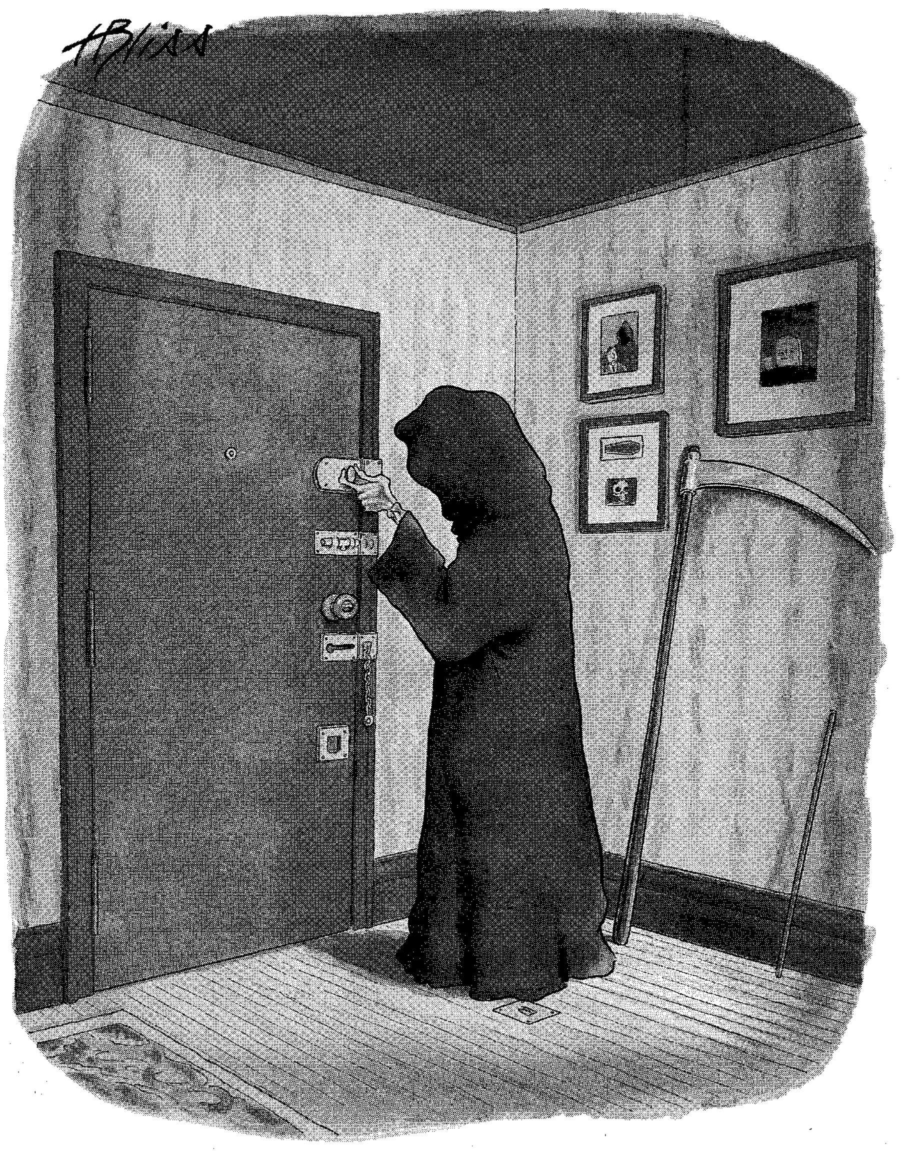

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ing as a model in Japan, and later she modelled in Italy. Instead of graduating from high school, she attended a community college in Orange County for a spell, and she studied dance and considered a career in sports medicine, until her appearance in "Poison Ivy" turned her into an actress.

She still works out four or five times a week with her personal trainer, lifting weights and boxing. She lives in a Spanish-style house, just over the hill from Hollywood, that was built afresh after the 1992 earthquake, replacing a nineteen-thirties house that was once the home of George Clooney. Pressly bought it a little more than a year ago, but recently put it back on the market, because she'd like to move to Tarzana, where she can get a larger property and better security for the same money. Pressly's home has four bedrooms, a guest house, and a view overlooking the San Fernando Valley, and is decorated in the kind of casual style familiar from the pages of the Pottery Barn catalogue and from stores that specialize in importing objets of indeterminate but exotic provenance. On Pressly's mantelpiece is an aged eight-volume set of the works of Walter Scott, propped up by monkey-shaped bookends. Attached to the wall above the staircase that leads down to her bedroom is a trickling fountain.

Pressly recently became engaged to Jay Gehrke, a former professional baseball player. "People will take me more seriously if I'm married," she says. "Look at Reese. She's so young, and so is Ryan. They were in love, she got pregnant, they got married. They've made good choices, and everyone respects them." Pressly would like to be a mother before she's thirty, but an accidental pregnancy like Witherspoon's first would not, she thinks, be forgiven in her case. "It wouldn't look good," she says. "And it would get in the way of my taking jobs." She admires Demi Moore for leaving the business for a few years and taking her family off to Idaho, and says that she can imagine doing the same thing at some point. But before she can escape she has to arrive.

While waiting for the role that will make her name, Pressly has been making something else of her name entirely. A year ago, on the set of "Torque," she began sketching designs for what would become a lingerie line called J'aime, which is due to appear in selected stores this winter. With the help of Sharise Neil, a lingerie designer who is one of the ex-wives of Vince Neil, the singer of Motley Crue, Pressly has created a line of underwear and sleepwear, made from soft fabrics like terry cloth and velvet and without the kind of uncomfortable underwiring that Pressly, while posing for one men's magazine or another, has become more familiar with than she would like. "I wanted something you don't just take off after you've had sex," she says.

J'aime has consumed much of Pressly's attention in recent months, and so it helped keep disappointment at bay when she learned, within the space of a week, that she hadn't got the "Blade 3" role or the role on "That 70's Show," and that the "Mask 2" audition had never been rescheduled. The launch of J'aime was due to take place that Saturday night in Las Vegas, at the Palms Casino Resort. Pressly had helped cast the models and select the soundtrack for the fashion show, and quickly corrected anyone who suggested that she, like some other celebrities with clothing lines, was just putting her name on a product without investing her creative energies in it. "I'm not J. Lo," she said dismissively, confident that in this realm, at least, her efforts trumped those of the bigger star.

On the day of the show, Pressly, her producer, and two stylists spent hours in her hotel suite, stitching last-minute

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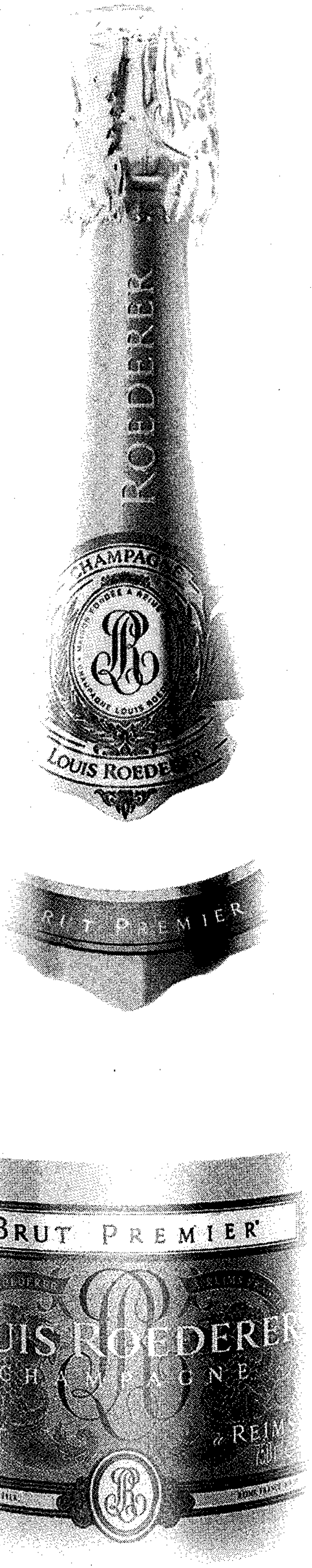
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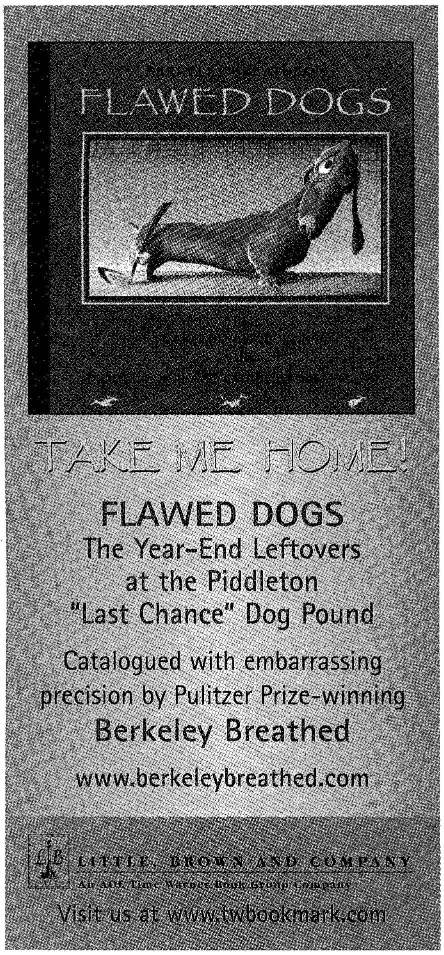
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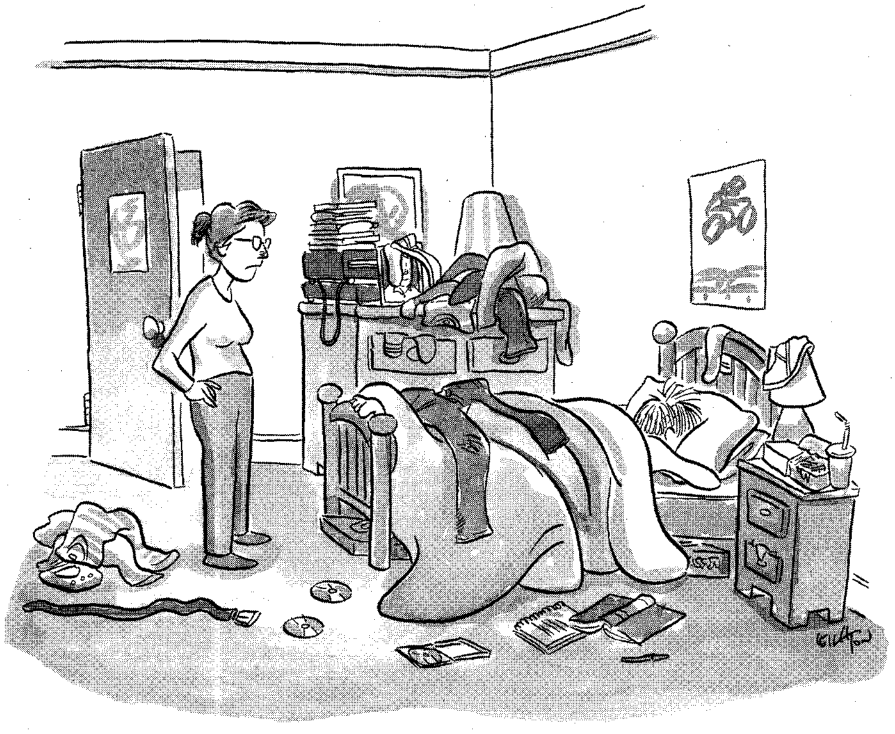
butterflies onto tulle skirts, and sending Pressly's assistant out to purchase the flesh-colored nipple coverups that were necessary to conform to local vice laws. By eight o'clock, everything seemed to be in place, and the catwalk, a platform spanning the pool, was being given a final check. The models were just about to begin a run-through when, suddenly, a forked streak of lightning split the sky.

"Are you kidding me?" Pressly said, looking up in disbelief. Within minutes, a strong wind was whipping the poolside palms, and heavy rain was drenching the party zone. The catwalk was covered with running water. The crew retreated into the hotel, and Pressly, in a moment of unimpeachable vulnerability, retreated indoors in distress.

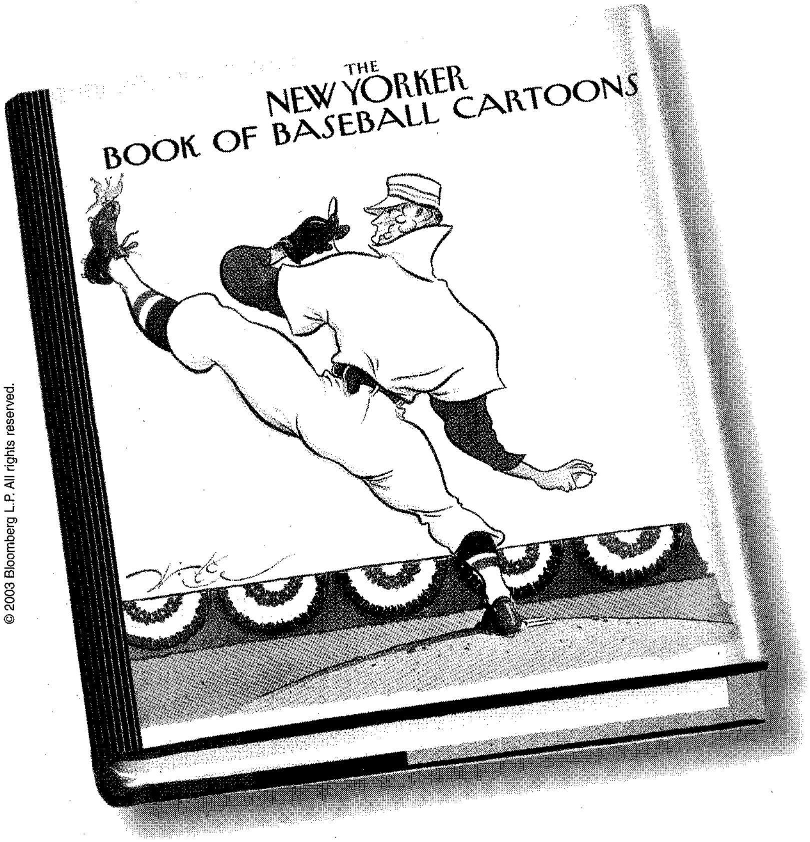
Two hours later, the skies had cleared and the water had been swabbed from the pool deck, which was now filled with partygoers. Pressly, wearing red pedal-pushers, a tight white short-sleeved shirt, and teetering Gucci shoes, was not merely composed as she walked the line of TV entertainment reporters but positively effervescent, posing for pictures with Tom Green and Lance Bass, while guys with beers stood a short distance away, shuffling and ogling. Jeff Zures and Jake Lemkuhl, two fraternity brothers who recently graduated from the University of Southern California, said they didn't know Jaime Pressly's name but they remembered the blond cheerleader in "Not Another Teen Movie." ("She was hot," Lemkuhl said.) They watched as the music started and the models took their turns on the runway: one in a wine-colored velvet baby-doll chemise; another in an abbreviated green lace wrap top and skirt; another in a tiny beige bra-and-panty set decorated with feathers. When one model stalked confidently down the runway and unfurled a white hooded terry-cloth robe to reveal a skimpy white bikini, Zures said, feelingly, "I like the way they turn from 'Star Wars' Ewoks into *Playboy* strippers."

At the end of the show, Pressly walked out to take her bow. From the poolside vantage point, neither she nor the partygoers could see the casino's enormous roadside sign, which towered over Flamingo Road, advertising the weekend's activities: there was Pressly's name, misspelled in neon. The models filed onto the runway to applaud her, and for once she looked oddly overdressed, standing there in her Gucci heels alongside her hired, nameless beauties. ♦



"I seized yesterday."

Major League Laughs!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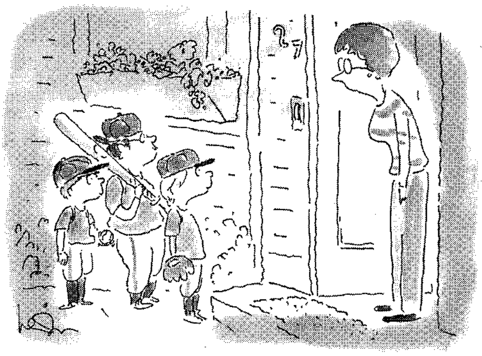

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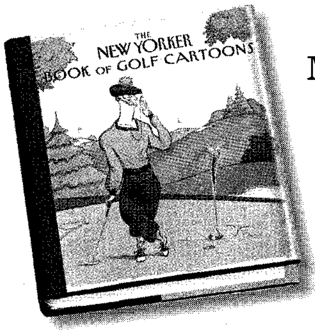
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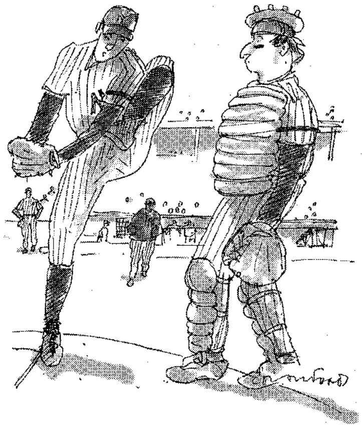

"Gimme a hand—I'm stuck."

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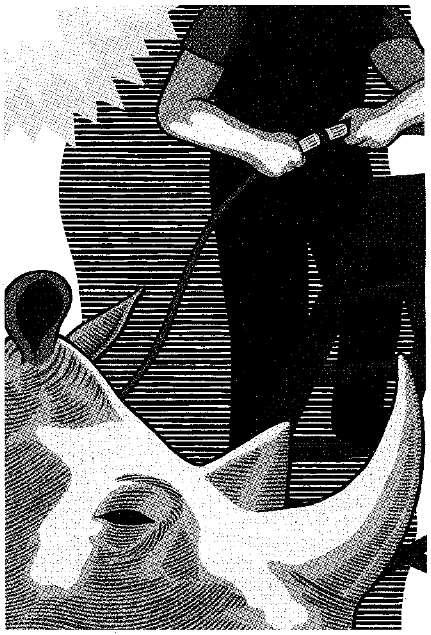
SILENT RESPONSIBILITY

Best boy. You see the credit scrolling up the screen (other people in your row are shuffling their feet impatiently) and, just for a moment, you let yourself wonder about the designation. What comes to mind will probably be wrong. The best boy is not a beardless youth with a saintly countenance, like Billy Budd. He is not the smirking winner of an on-set popularity contest. He does not have an assistant best boy and there is no such thing as a second-best boy, although the credits for the comedy "Airplane II: The Sequel" do include a "worst boy": Adolf Hitler. Even when the best boy is a woman, the title does not change. As for its origins, they're unclear. In Victorian England, many assistants were called boys, as in "Get me another tankard of ale, boy." One theory posits that the name stuck when an English foreman was hiring theatrical laborers and said, "Give me your best boy!"

Steve Comesky, who is the best boy on a remake of "The Stepford Wives," which is now shooting in Connecticut and New York, seems a little uneasy with a title that is at once immodest (best) and somehow denigrating (boy). When people ask him what he does for a living, he says, "I tell them I'm an electrician." Comesky, a tall guy in his mid-thirties with a buzz cut and the shoulders of a wide receiver, says that his job is pretty straightforward: "I do what my boss tells me to do, pal." He works as the chief assistant to the gaffer, otherwise known as the head electrician. Comesky grew up on Long Island, and got into the movie business after graduating from high school. He hangs spots, snakes cable, provides power to the stars' trailers, and helps light the scenery whenever the camera is repositioned for a new shot. He stretches his legs often while on the set; the job involves a lot of standing (always outside the actors' sight lines) and what he calls "silent responsibility"—replacing burned-out bulbs, making sure no one trips over a light cord.

When reporters come to visit the set of a movie like "The Stepford Wives," they come to see Nicole, or Bette. They do not, as a rule, come to see the best boy, and when a reporter does, the following things will happen. Everyone in the crew will call the best boy "sir." They will give him a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich with "the crusts cut off just the way you like it, sir!" They will ask him to sign papers marked "Very Important Papers." They will thank him "for all the hard work yesterday . . . the orphans couldn't be more pleased with how you saved them." A production assistant will pretend to be his personal masseuse.

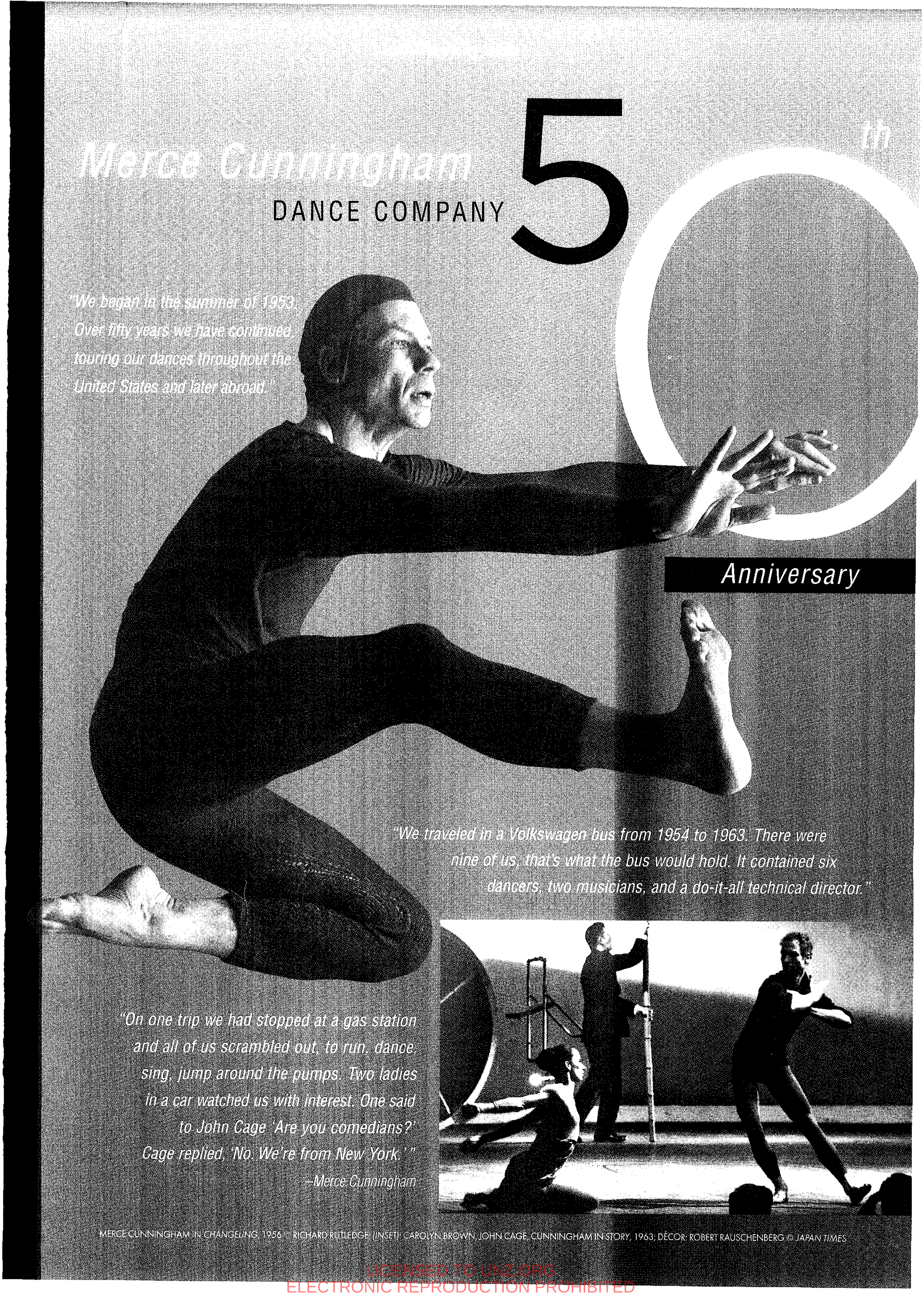


Comesky gamely endures the practical joking: "I'll be getting this all day, pal." A long stretch of silent responsibility ensues, and then the gaffer asks Comesky to light a mounted rhinoceros head.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

—*Michael Agger*

Merce Cunningham
DANCE COMPANY
50th Anniversary



"We began in the summer of 1953. Over fifty years we have continued touring our dances throughout the United States and later abroad."

"We traveled in a Volkswagen bus from 1954 to 1963. There were nine of us, that's what the bus would hold. It contained six dancers, two musicians, and a do-it-all technical director."

"On one trip we had stopped at a gas station and all of us scrambled out, to run, dance, sing, jump around the pumps. Two ladies in a car watched us with interest. One said to John Cage 'Are you comedians?' Cage replied, 'No. We're from New York.' "

—Merce Cunningham

MERCE CUNNINGHAM IN *CHANGELING*, 1956 © RICHARD RUTLEDGE; (*INSET*): CAROLYN BROWN, JOHN CAGE, CUNNINGHAM IN *STORY*, 1963; DÉCOR: ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG © *JAPAN TIMES*

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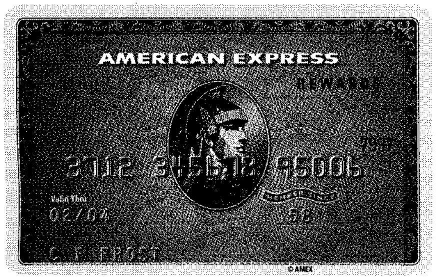
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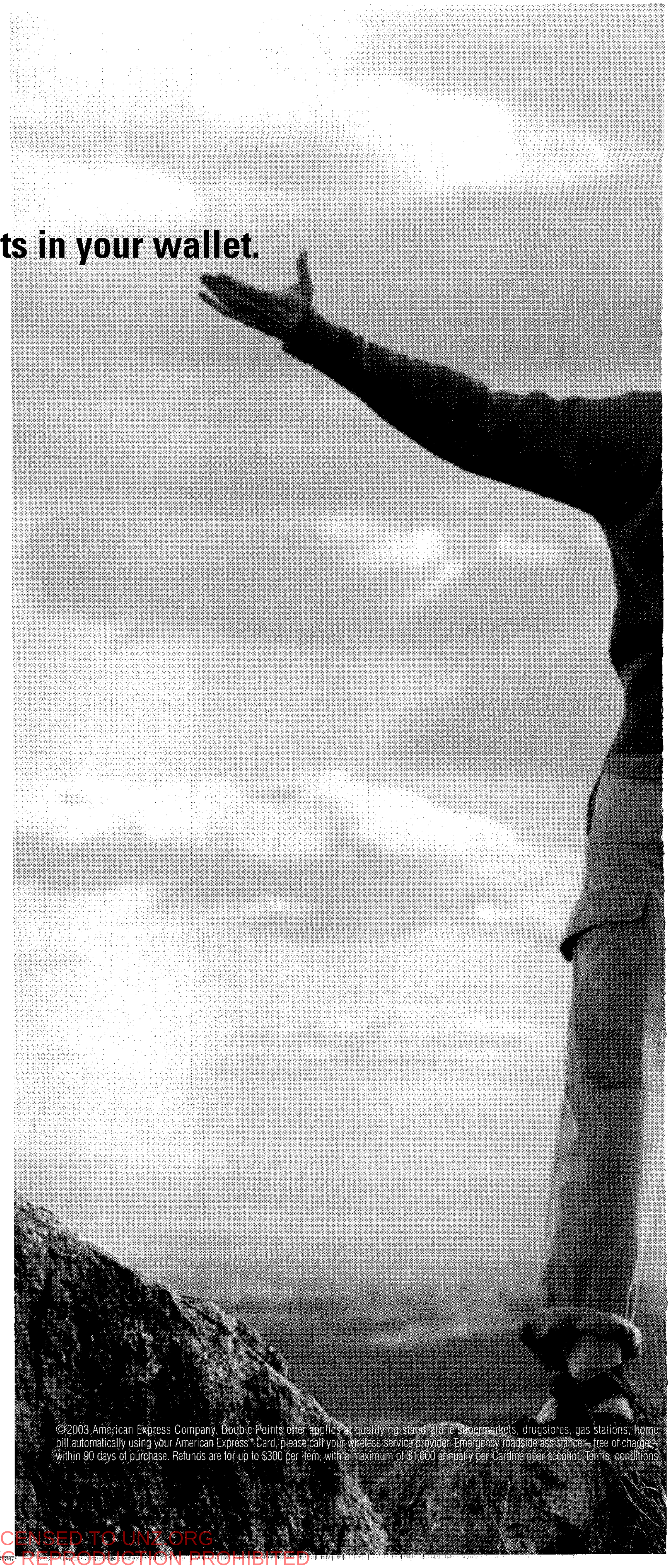

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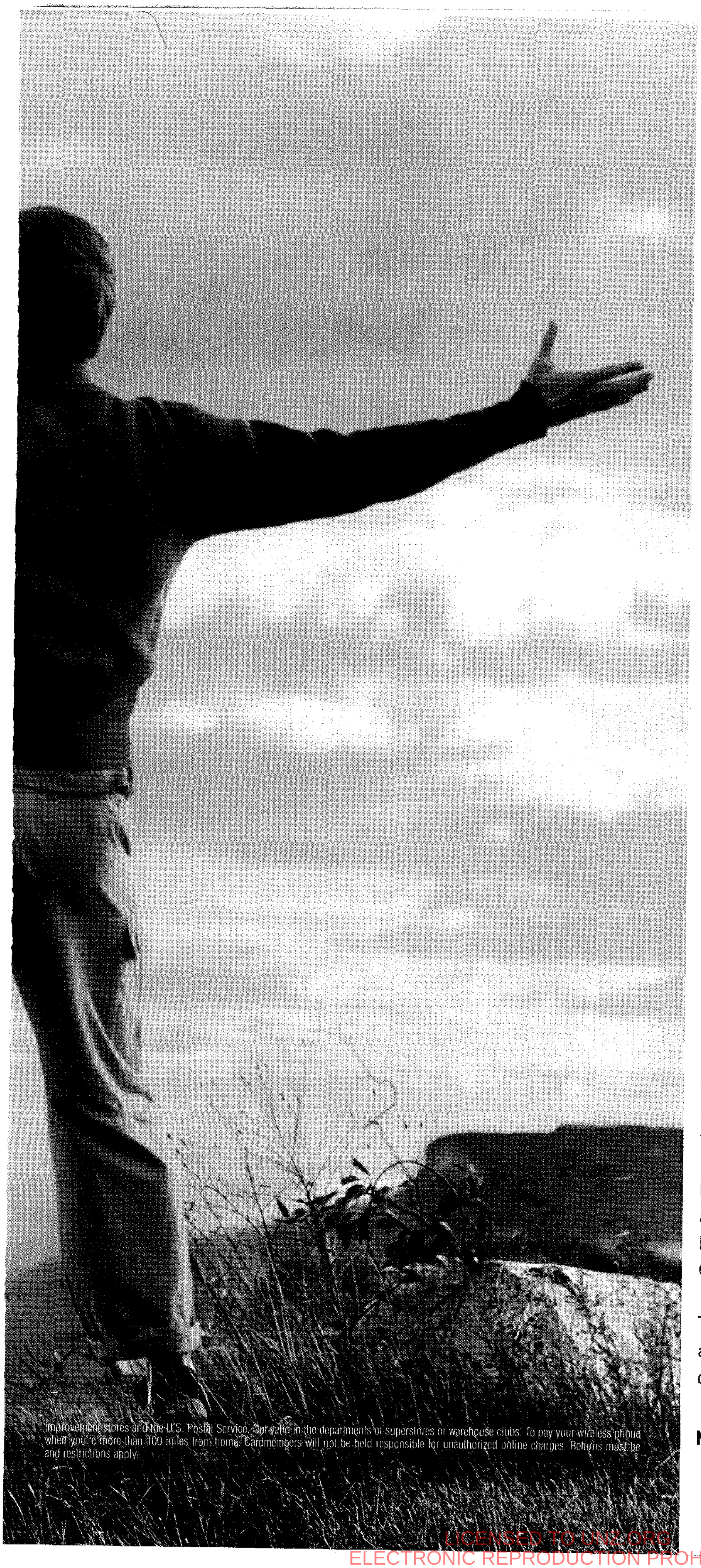

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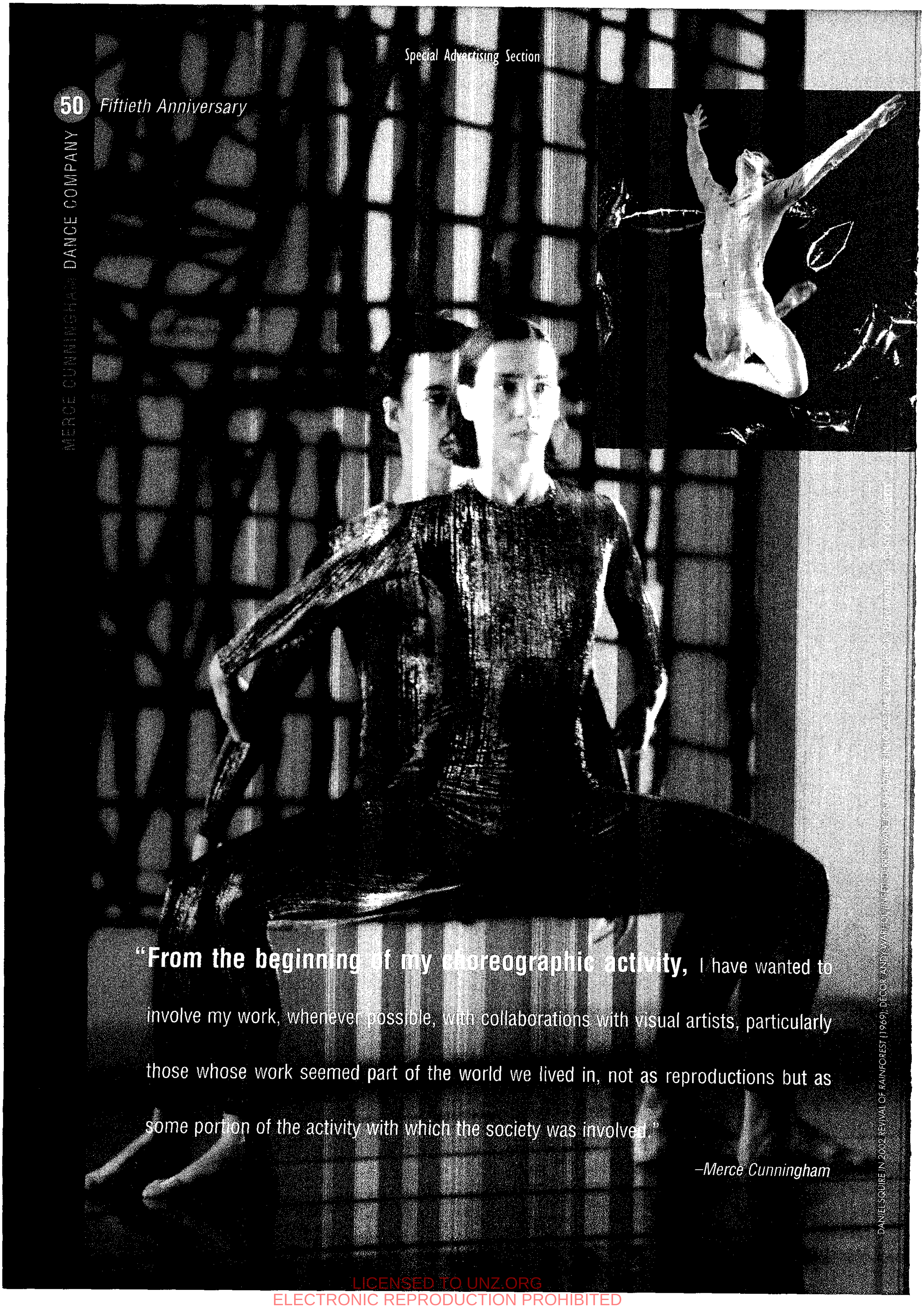

“From the beginning of my choreographic activity, I have wanted to involve my work, whenever possible, with collaborations with visual artists, particularly those whose work seemed part of the world we lived in, not as reproductions but as some portion of the activity with which the society was involved.”

–Merce Cunningham

DANIEL SQUIRE IN 2002 REVIVAL OF *RAINFOREST* (1969); DECOR: ANDY WARHOL (INSET) DERRY SWAN, JONAH BOKAER IN *LOOSETIME* (2002); DECOR: TERRY WINTERS © TONY DOUGHERTY

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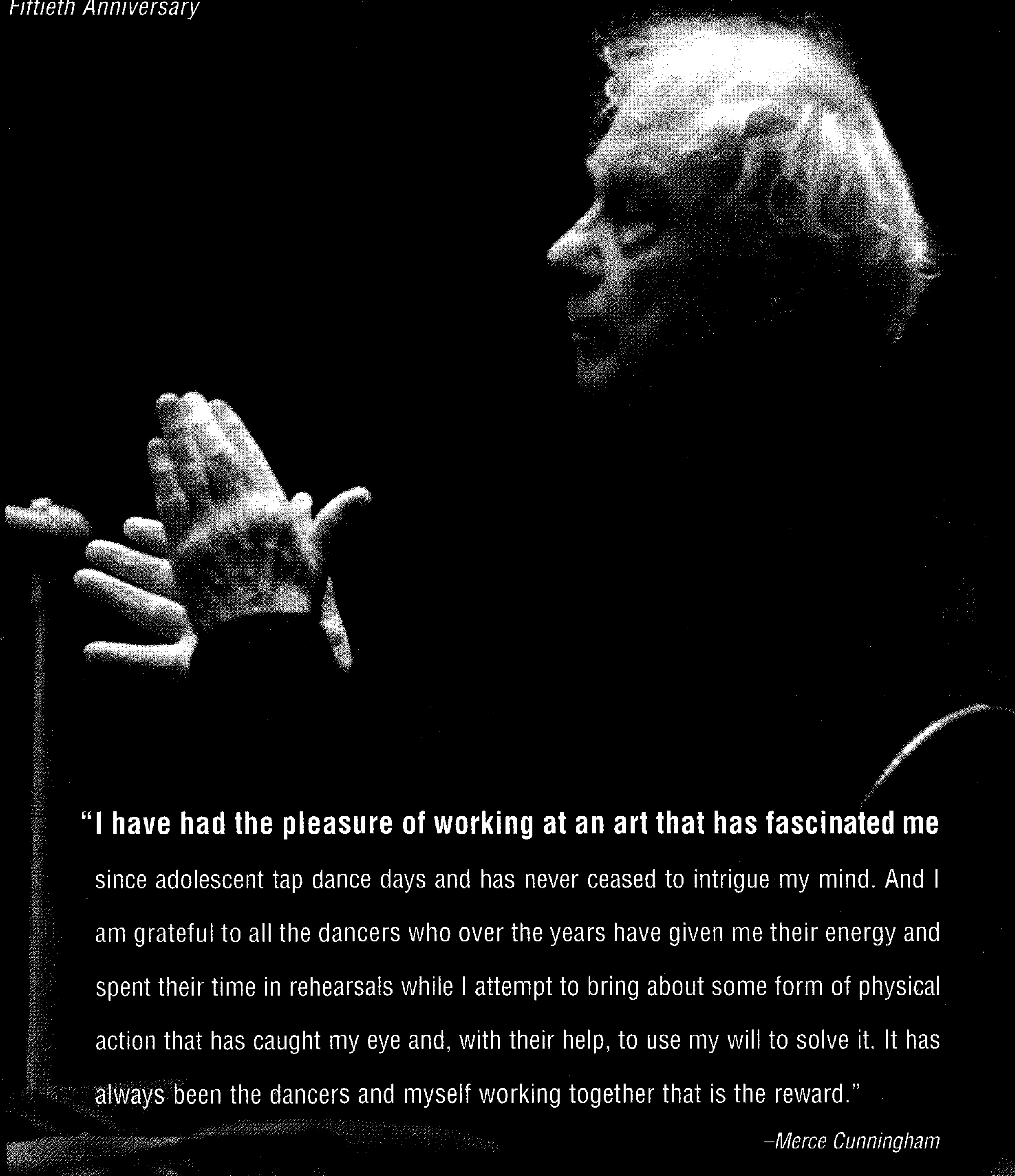
50 *Fiftieth Anniversary*

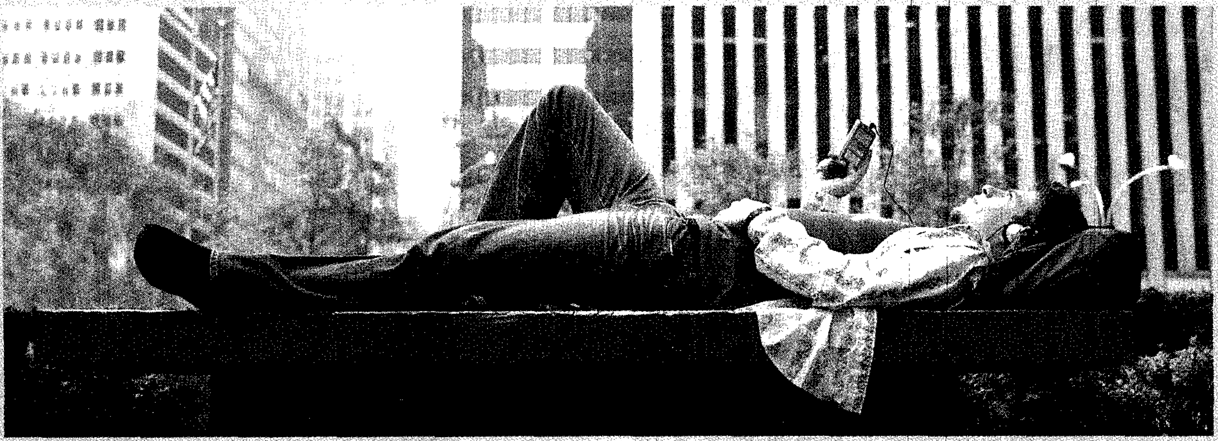
MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY



"I have had the pleasure of working at an art that has fascinated me since adolescent tap dance days and has never ceased to intrigue my mind. And I am grateful to all the dancers who over the years have given me their energy and spent their time in rehearsals while I attempt to bring about some form of physical action that has caught my eye and, with their help, to use my will to solve it. It has always been the dancers and myself working together that is the reward."

–Merce Cunningham

MERCE CLAPPING HANDS/THE DANCE COMPANY IN CLASS, ZELLERBACH HALL, UC BERKELEY, 2002 © TONY DOUGHERTY; *(INSETS LEFT TO RIGHT)*: DERRY SWAN IN *FLUID CANVAS*, 2002; MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY IN 2002 REVIVAL OF *PICTURES* (1984) © TONY DOUGHERTY.



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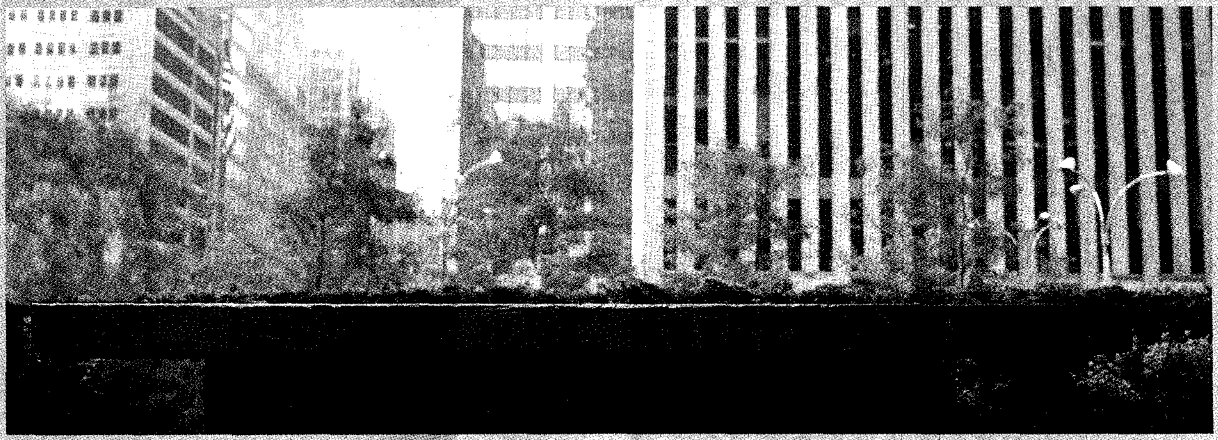

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50 *Fiftieth Anniversary*

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

A Brilliant Iconoclast

A 50th Anniversary Tribute to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company

As many a commentator has said, Merce Cunningham changed the way we look at dance. In the summer of 1953, working together with John Cage, dancers, musicians, and artists, he founded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at North Carolina's Black Mountain College. The company would come to represent his unique vision: choreographing dances independently of his collaborators; using chance procedures to create dance; making breakthroughs in the use of film with dance; and pioneering early and continuing applications of technology.

Ever the iconoclast, Cunningham is now revered as one of the cultural giants of our age. This year, the Merce Cunningham Dance Company proudly celebrates its 50th anniversary with a tribute to the enduring artistic vision of its founder, and the unwavering dedication of its members.

Capping a twenty-city 50th anniversary celebration, Cunningham brings two new works to the Brooklyn Academy of Music this week. "Split Sides" will have its world première on October 14th, with music by Brit alt-rockers Radiohead and Icelandic experimental band Sigur Rós (the two bands will play live on that night only), décor by photographers Robert Heishman and Catherine Yass, costumes by James Hall, and lighting by James F. Ingalls. The evening begins with the New York première of "Fluid Canvas," another Cunningham exploration in technology and dance. The program will be repeated for three consecutive nights beginning October 16th.

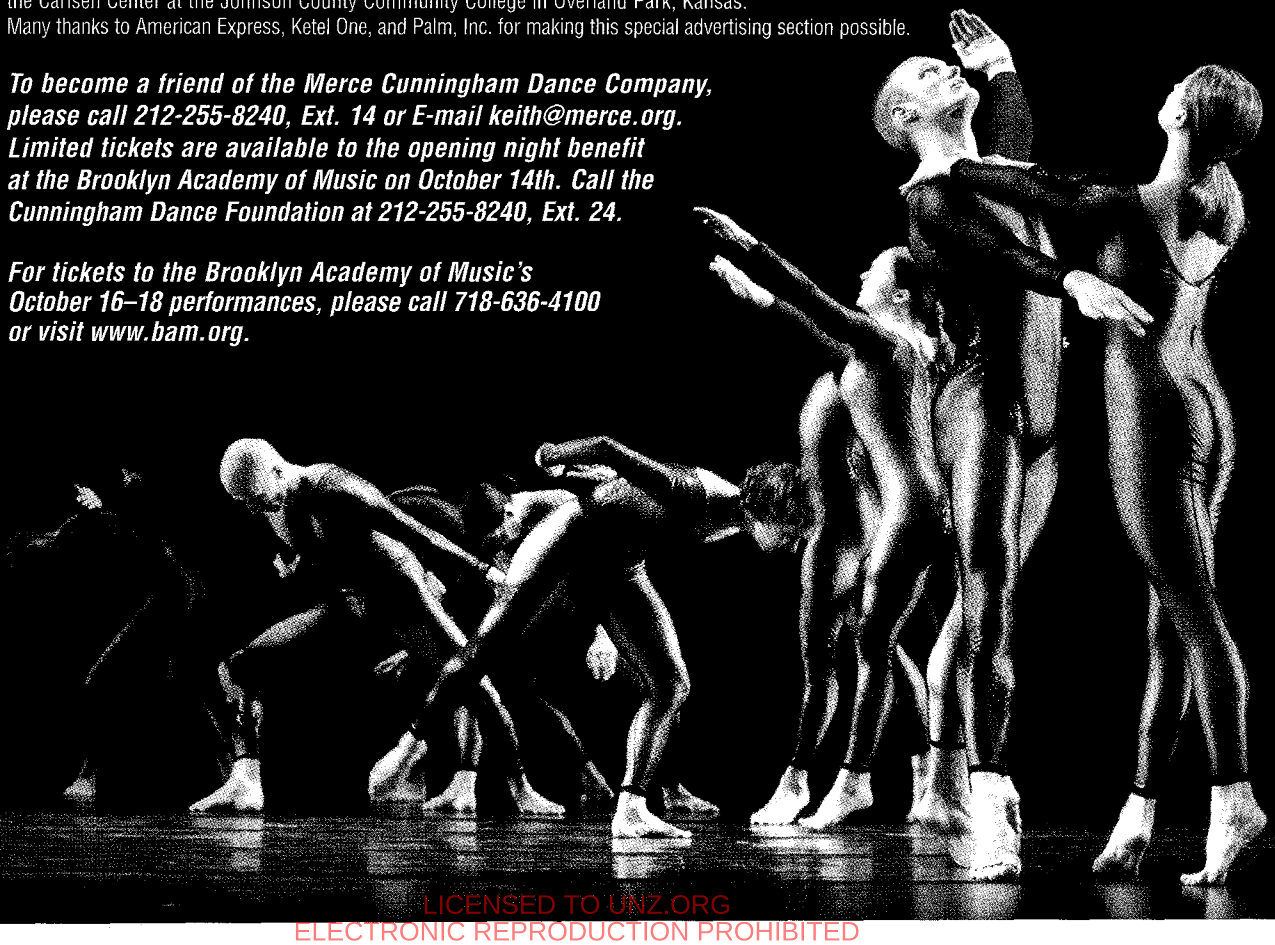
We salute the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and its historic milestone.

Major support for the 50th Anniversary celebration was provided by the Howard Gilman Foundation, Sage and John Cowles, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Phyllis Wattis.

"Split Sides" was commissioned by BITE:04, the Barbican in London, and the College of Saint Benedict-Benedicta Arts Center in St. Joseph, Minnesota. It was co-commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the Carlsen Center at the Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas.
Many thanks to American Express, Ketel One, and Palm, Inc. for making this special advertising section possible.

To become a friend of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, please call 212-255-8240, Ext. 14 or E-mail keith@merce.org. Limited tickets are available to the opening night benefit at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on October 14th. Call the Cunningham Dance Foundation at 212-255-8240, Ext. 24.

For tickets to the Brooklyn Academy of Music's October 16–18 performances, please call 718-636-4100 or visit www.bam.org.



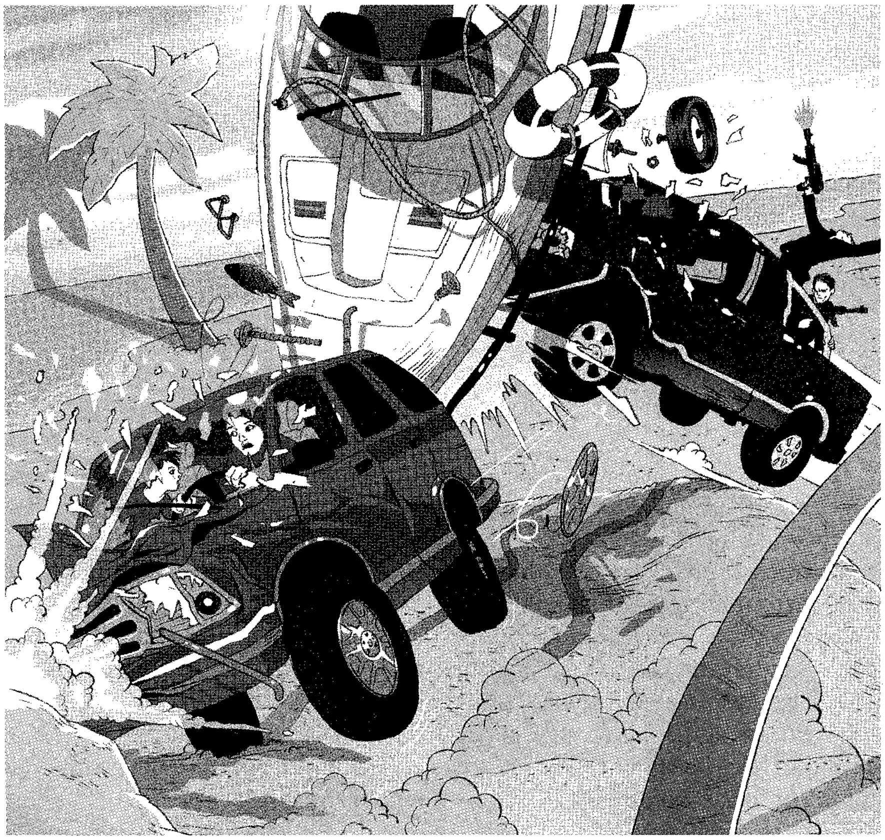
MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY IN *FLUID CANVAS*, 2002 © TONY DOUGHERTY

ANNALS OF FILMMAKING

THE ART OF THE CRASH

Even the most carefully scripted Hollywood stunt has its surprises.

BY KEVIN CONLEY



TOMER HANUKA

Ever since the days of the Keystone Kops, Hollywood stuntmen have called the dangerous stuff they do "gags." A punch is a gag. A car jumping across an open drawbridge is a gag. An aerial dogfight requiring elaborate flight plans and F.A.A. oversight is a gag; and so is a fiery explosion that blasts your hero off a pier and into the Gulf of Mexico.

In late August, I stood on a thousand-foot-long pier just outside St. Petersburg, Florida, with the crew of "The Punisher"—yet another movie version of a Marvel Comics property. We were watching Mike Owen, a stunt double, get ready for a fire gag. He knelt on the edge of a floating dock just off the pier, wearing three layers of thin, fire-protective long underwear known as Nomex under his costume. The Nomex layers had been soaking in a cooler at forty-two degrees. Once Owen put them on, it didn't matter that it was noon and so hot that nearly everybody on the pier was dripping with sweat; Owen wanted to hurry up and do the gag, just so that he could stop shivering. In addition, his face and his hair had been slathered in a gel that protects you from burns—but only as long as it's wet. After a crew member finished putting it on, Owen had about five minutes in which to complete the gag safely.

The explosion would be the climax of an extended chase scene, which was being shot in Fort De Soto Park. The scene would take about a minute of screen time, but it required a week of shooting and included a fair selection of thrills. In addition to the fire gag, there was a series of car jumps, an S.U.V. rollover, and a tricky car crash that Gary Hymes, the second-unit director, who had choreographed the entire stunt se-

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quence, was saving for the last day on location. For that final stunt, Hymes somehow had to make a motorboat that was hitched to a trailer suddenly come loose from a car pulling it down the road, bounce high in the air, then slam down on a Ford pickup racing behind it—without killing anybody.

The chase down the beach comes early in the movie, and it's meant to establish the motivation of Frank Castle, a.k.a. the Punisher. He is the darkest character in the moral universe of Marvel Comics; this sequence, in which his wife and child are killed before his eyes and he himself is shot, blown up, and left for dead, helps establish why. The Punisher first appeared in 1974, as a mercenary hired to kill Spider-Man, and in 1986, after several bloodthirsty cameos, he got his own series. The philosophy of the gun-toting vigilante superhero is simple: "I kill only those who deserve killing."

The Punisher, relying on righteous anger and government weapons training, has no superpowers, and this gives the movie's stunt sequences a human scale that's missing from most Marvel franchises. As Owen rehearsed the fire gag, he and the film's director, Jonathan Hensleigh, discussed the scene's narrative elements: at the start, Castle, barely alive after being shot in the chest, sees a tongue of flame approaching—it's supposed to be gasoline that the executioners have poured on the dock and then lit. (The fuel is a mixture of unleaded gasoline and diesel, which photographs better and has a slower burn rate.) Hensleigh wanted Owen to recoil as the fire closed in, a movement that would, coincidentally, bring Owen out of his collapsed position to a nearly upright stance, allowing him to be both more visible to the cameras and better situated for the ensuing gag.

The crew had positioned two propane-filled cannisters so that they were aimed directly at Owen. The fireball they were set to deliver was rigged to flare at the same instant that a ratchet cable, which was hooked to a snatch harness hidden under Owen's costume, jerked him off his knees and tossed him thirty feet away, into the Gulf. The equipment was hidden in plain sight—the ratchet line was threaded through a standard hoist, the sort you'd hang your prize-winning tuna from; if any wires did show up in the shot, they would be digitally erased in post-production. Owen had been rehearsing all week, hooking himself to the equipment, varying the height and velocity of his trajectory, and trying different rag-doll motions in the air. He and Hymes had gone over the video playbacks until they found the most convincing manner in which to be blown sky high.

As Owen walked to his mark on the edge of the dock and knelt down, he said, "Finally, it's happening." Six cameras—two on each of two barges in the water, and two more stowed in explosion-resistant iron cannisters on the dock—were focussed directly on him. The extra cameras were there partly to insure that the gag wouldn't have to be redone if one camera slipped out of focus. The array of angles also increased the chances of getting a shot that would make the audience gasp.

Hensleigh's assistant yelled, "Let's go hot on stunts," and somebody else called out, "Remember to hold your breath, Mike," and then the effects man hit the gas feed from six propane tanks that had been hidden out of camera range. The tongue of fire raced across the dock and ignited a fireball that hit Owen full in the face just as the ratchet jerked him off his knees, up into the sky, and out into the water.

A few seconds later, the director said, "Cut!" and two safety divers swam over to the spot where Owen had landed. He surfaced and shot a thumbs-up. Everyone on the pier clapped and hooted, but nobody moved until the divers had brought him back to the dock and they could see him walking on his own power.

Hensleigh sat before the video monitor to see how the shot had turned out. The coverage was excellent: the cameras had picked up both the blast of flame and Owen's flight. As he wiped gel off his face, Owen watched the monitors

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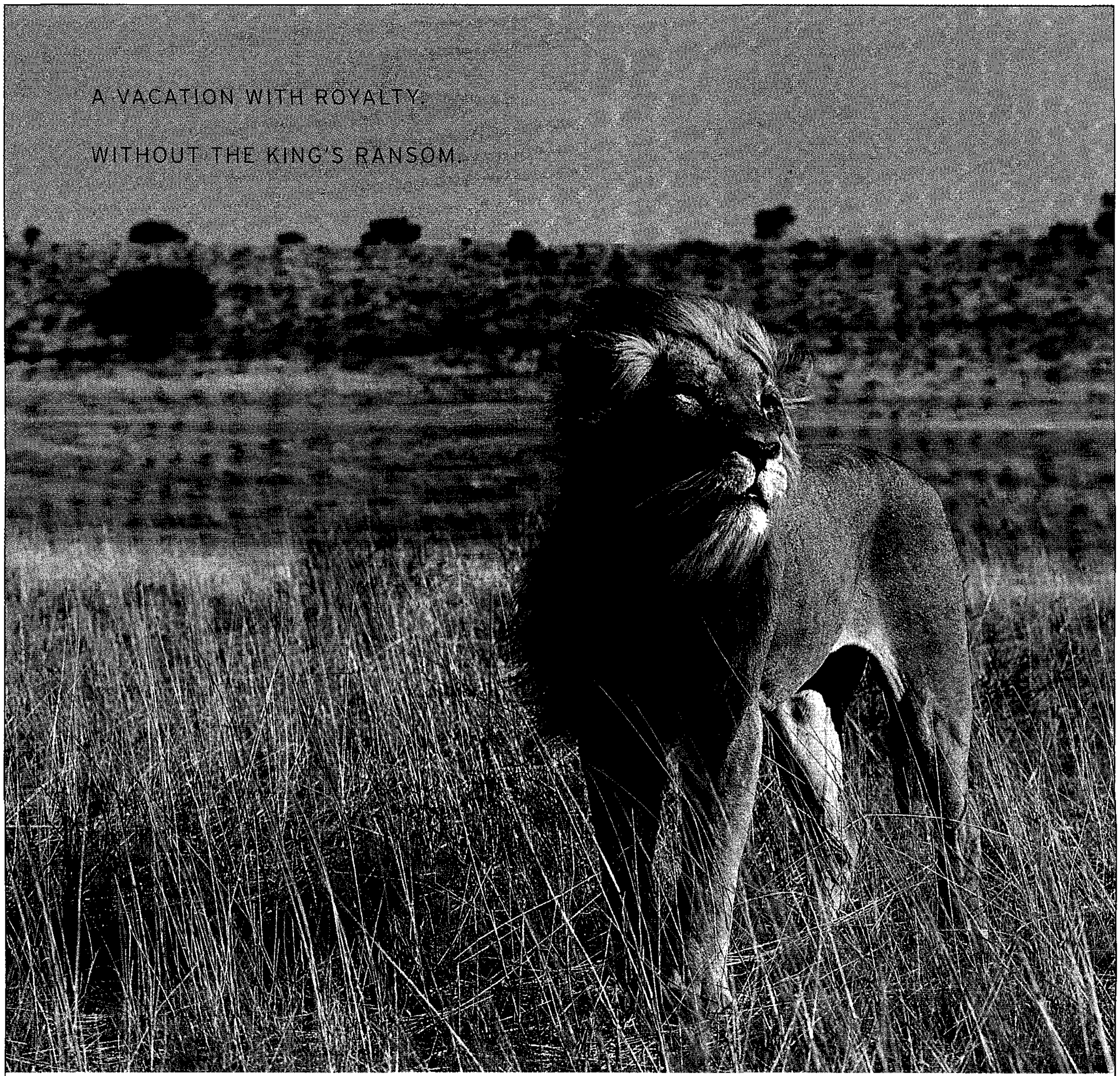

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for a moment, then walked away, looking slightly dazed, like a man getting a standing eight count. A producer rushed over and said, "How are you? Seriously, what did you feel?"

"I felt warm," he said, shrugging off the attention. "I feel fine. I love it."

The first stuntmen weren't stuntmen first. They started out as something else and got desperate or bored or ambitious. They were extras. They were circus clowns and acrobats, prizefighters, barnstormers, steeplejacks and flagpole-sitters, out-of-work roustabouts from the California oil fields, rodeo riders from the Wild West show circuit. One account credits the first stunt to an L.A. hypnotist who, in 1908, accepted five dollars to dive into the surf in a blond wig during the filming of "The Count of Monte Cristo." Another gives the honor to a drunken Indian named Eagle Eye, who, during the shooting of D. W. Griffith's "Intolerance," in 1916, accepted a three-dollar bump in his daily fee to fall from a Babylonian tower onto a hay cart.

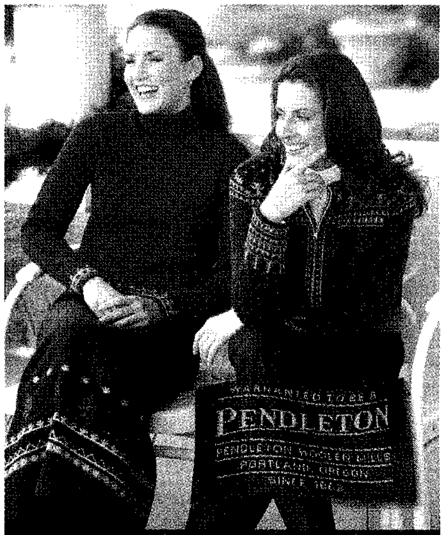
These men probably called what they did gags because they did so many, especially in Mack Sennett's Keystone Kops comedies. Sennett's props could be elaborate—his studio was filled with wind machines, moving sidewalks, and a fleet of trick Keystone Kop wagons that could spin out seemingly forever (spreading liquid soap on the road facilitated this effect). But the men generally did their own gags, with very little trickery. If a scene called for a line of twenty men to hang off the end of a wagon and be dragged through the streets as the driver weaved around telephone poles, all they did was spread a little sand on the ground and go. These slapstick specialists prided themselves on their ability to pull off, as Sennett wrote in his autobiography, "any foolish stunt my psychopaths in the writing room could think up." And they didn't stop when the cameras did: one of their favorite gags involved wiring the studio's urinal so that it would shock anyone who used it.

After the First World War, the studios started churning out low-budget Westerns, the sort of blood-and-thunder quickies that could turn a champion saddle-bronc rider like Yakima Canutt into a silent-movie action hero. Canutt was tall, handsome, and handy with a bullwhip. Like all rodeo riders, he knew how to hit the ground. His acting, in silent features such as "Ridin' Mad," ranged from jumping off a cliff on horseback to jumping off a cliff onto a horse's back. He also excelled at fistfighting scenes—especially brawls that involved the smashing of saloon windows. Unfortunately, his voice couldn't make the jump to talkies—he said he sounded "like a hillbilly in a well"—but he adapted, playing bad guys and doubling for stars like John Wayne and Clark Gable.

In the ensuing decades, Canutt made technical improvements that became standard practice. He is thought to be the first person to have positioned the camera over the shoulder of the guy getting coldcocked during a screen brawl; the camera records the punch being thrown and the head snapping back without detecting that the punch never actually connected. He began overseeing the explosives teams and the rigging crew, unofficially, and giving the directors tips for staging stunts more effectively. Eventually, the producers simply handed him scripts and told him to write in the action scenes. (He designed and filmed the chariot race in the 1959 epic "Ben-Hur.") Thanks largely to his efforts, the second-unit director became the chief figure on the set in charge of stunts and spectacle, and in 1966 he received the only Oscar ever given in recognition of a stuntman's work—an honorary award "for developing safety devices to protect stunt men everywhere" and "for creating the profession of stunt man as it exists today."

Although second-unit directors have, if anything, grown in importance since the sixties, their increasingly elaborate work remains for the most part unheralded. But on the set of a movie like "The Punisher" the director often stands by quietly while the second-unit director vets the big-money scenes, and the headline talent blends into the background while a stuntman like Mike Owen enters the catering tent to the cheers of the crew.

Complex fire gags and chase sequences aren't sketched hastily on location or improvised on Hollywood soundstages. They're planned and storyboarded weeks in advance. In August,



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while "The Punisher" was still shooting, I dropped by the pre-production offices of "Cellular," in Santa Monica, to watch the director, David Ellis, and his second-unit director, Freddie Hice, plan a chase scene. Ellis and Hice had worked together before, most recently on "The Matrix Reloaded": Ellis, the second-unit director on that film, choreographed the high-speed chase scene in which Carrie-Anne Moss drives a motorcycle recklessly into oncoming expressway traffic. The scene gained renown for its computer-generated effects, but Ellis shot most of the sequence using real stunt drivers. The most memorable segments—the cameras racing in dizzyingly close, in traffic, either leading or shadowing the drivers—bear Ellis's stamp.

Shooting was scheduled to begin in less than four weeks, but Ellis sounded relaxed. "Go to your script, page 24," he said to a team of five consultants, as he pulled Matchbox cars from a zippered bag. Ellis, a big surfer-blond guy who started his career performing stunts ("Smokey and the Bandit"), nimbly arranged about a dozen tiny cars (Jeep, minivan, police car, Mercedes S.U.V., Hot Wheels muscle car) inside Magic Marker lines on a posterboard on his desk. The consultants glanced briefly at the script, then watched two lanes of traffic take shape under his fingers.

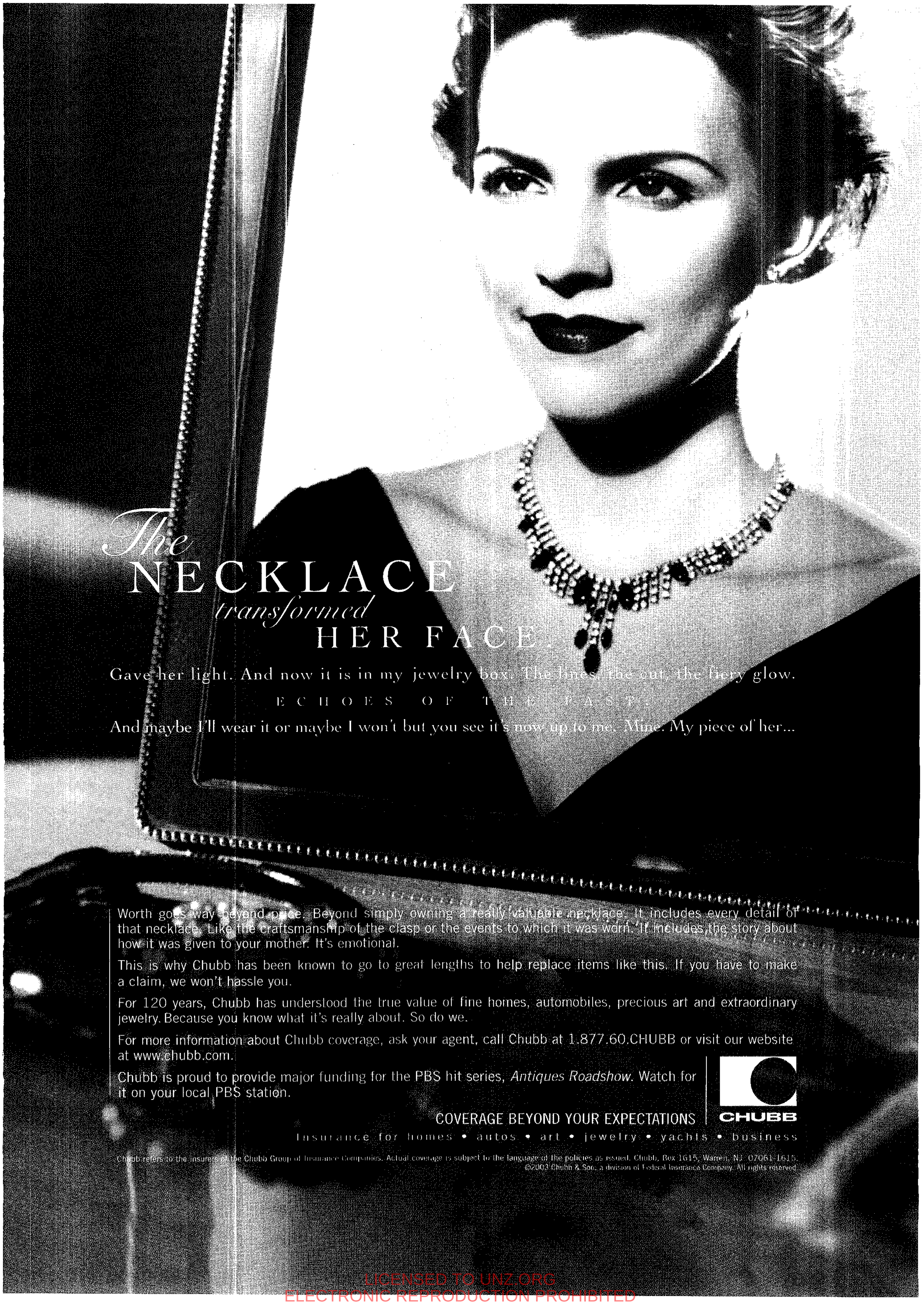
In the scene, which was to be shot near Dodger Stadium in September, the young hero of "Cellular" is speeding across Los Angeles, desperate to track down his old high-school teacher, who has been kidnapped and is being held in an attic (and is secretly communicating with him by cell phone). "So what he's going to see ahead of him is this Oriental driving-school car and some chick in a Mercedes who's talking on a phone and not paying attention," Ellis said. "And he's stuck here." He moved a little Jeep into an empty lane. "He can't go around this way: there's oncoming traffic. So he's going to make this move to the curb lane and yell to the chick, 'Get off the freakin' phone! Pay attention to the road.' Even though he's on his phone. And, as he's yelling 'Pay attention' and he looks back, we'll have a trash truck, with its flashers on, picking up a Dumpster."

Ellis and his colleagues immediately digressed to discuss the timing and hydraulics of various automatic lift arms on garbage trucks—the up-and-over type, the in-and-up, the curl—and the effect that each might have on the staging of the final sequence, where, as luck would have it, the arm rises just enough for the hero, in a Ford Bronco, to squeak by. But Freddie Hice, who, as the second-unit director, oversees the stunt doubles and drivers, brought them back to business: he wanted to know what kind of move and countermove they should plan for the moment when the hero recklessly veers into oncoming traffic.

At this point, a lesser team might throw in some "power slides"—the flashy controlled skids that are the stock-in-trade of the stuntman or stuntwoman—but Ellis knows the difference between spectacle and bombast. Some TV directors back in the heyday of stunt driving ("The Dukes of Hazzard," "The A-Team") weren't so abstemious, and viewers grew bored with the unvarying diet of one-eighties, three-sixties, roll-overs, and bridge jumps. He and Hice decided that all they really needed was a "zhoom-zhoom"—that is, an exploratory swerve into oncoming traffic followed by a hasty retreat.

In the course of the meeting, Ellis employed similar technical terms, such as "fweeshhhh" (the feeling the viewer gets as the camera quickly closes in on the garbage truck), "RRRR!" (the sound of tires locked in a skid), and "vwum-vwum-vwum" (the rapid appearance and disappearance of opposing traffic in the foreground of a side-angle tracking shot of the Jeep). Apparently, the basic language of car stunts hasn't changed since you were six years old. However, the applications have grown more sophisticated. Every "zhoom" and "RRRR!" was followed by a lengthy discussion of camera angle and equipment. "We can still go in here handheld and get a clean P.O.V.," Ellis would say. Or, "We'll get a crane, a supertechno."

When it came to plotting the actual stunt—exactly how the Bronco driving just under the garbage rig would be filmed—Ellis spoke in a tone of restraint, saying, "I don't think we're going to do any big 'Olé!' " They discussed,



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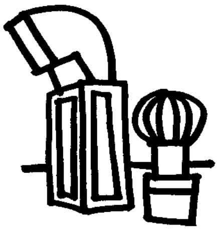
then quickly discarded, the idea of filming the sequence backward—with the Bronco starting in contact with the garbage rig and driving rapidly away from the crash—then reversing the footage in the editing room. They also rejected C.G., or computer generation—it's safer but far more expensive. (And although no one admits it, to a career stuntman C.G. feels like cheating.)

Ellis and Hice wanted to avoid a "cliché shot" in which the vehicle emerged from a seemingly inevitable wreck miraculously unscathed. So they decided to have the Bronco clear the lift arm but not the garbage can it was lifting: the top of the windshield would smash into the little wheels at the bottom of the trash can. To sell it to the audience, they planned an over-the-shoulder shot of a stunt double smashing the hero's car into the trash can (shot on location), followed by a separate closeup of the hero as the windshield shatters (shot in the studio, with safety glass).

Performing the on-location stunt would be dangerous. As far as Ellis and Hice could tell from sitting around a desk strewn with toy cars, the stunt driver would have to duck right before impact—steering up to the crash and then lying down on the seat at the last possible instant, driving blind as the windshield shattered around him.

"The guy's got to go down," Ellis said, confirming his decision. "Whoever's driving the car there, you're down."

Both Ellis and Hice had performed this duck-down maneuver themselves, but they knew they'd have no trouble hiring someone to perform the trick for them. The crash would be worth about fifteen hundred dollars for every take to the man who performed it, in addition to the standard Screen Actors Guild day rate for stuntmen, which is six hundred and seventy-eight dollars.



"After that shot, we'll need a line of dialogue," Ellis said. "An exclamation, about what just happened to him."

"How about 'Shit'?" Hice said.

A few days later, I was back on the St. Petersburg set of "The Punisher," where everyone was moving with a sense of urgency. Tropical thunderstorms had forced the crew to stop filming almost every day at five o'clock. And this afternoon was their last chance to nail the boat gag: at the end of the day, the crew had to clear out of Fort De Soto Park in order to make room for the holiday-weekend crowds.

The boat gag, the one treacherous effect left to shoot, was the heart of the violent sequence in which the Punisher's family is gunned down by villains. It had been carefully designed by Gary Hymes, the second-unit director. The original script had left the sequence vague, describing it as: "They jump in the pickup and give chase." Hymes had invented everything else. He had moved the chase from the pavement to the beach. He had added big jumps on the hard sand, a rollover, and enough mayhem to keep the audience from wondering why four hit men with submachine guns were having such a tough time taking out an unarmed mother and her ten-year-old son.

In the chase scene, Castle's wife and son are driving a Chevy Blazer that is pulling a twelve-foot motorboat on a trailer hitch. (The Castles enjoy scuba diving.) The four hit men pursue them in a Ford pickup truck. For most of the chase, the boat acts as an accidental shield, bouncing up and ruining the gunmen's aim or swerving into their path and preventing them from pulling alongside to shoot the Punisher's wife.

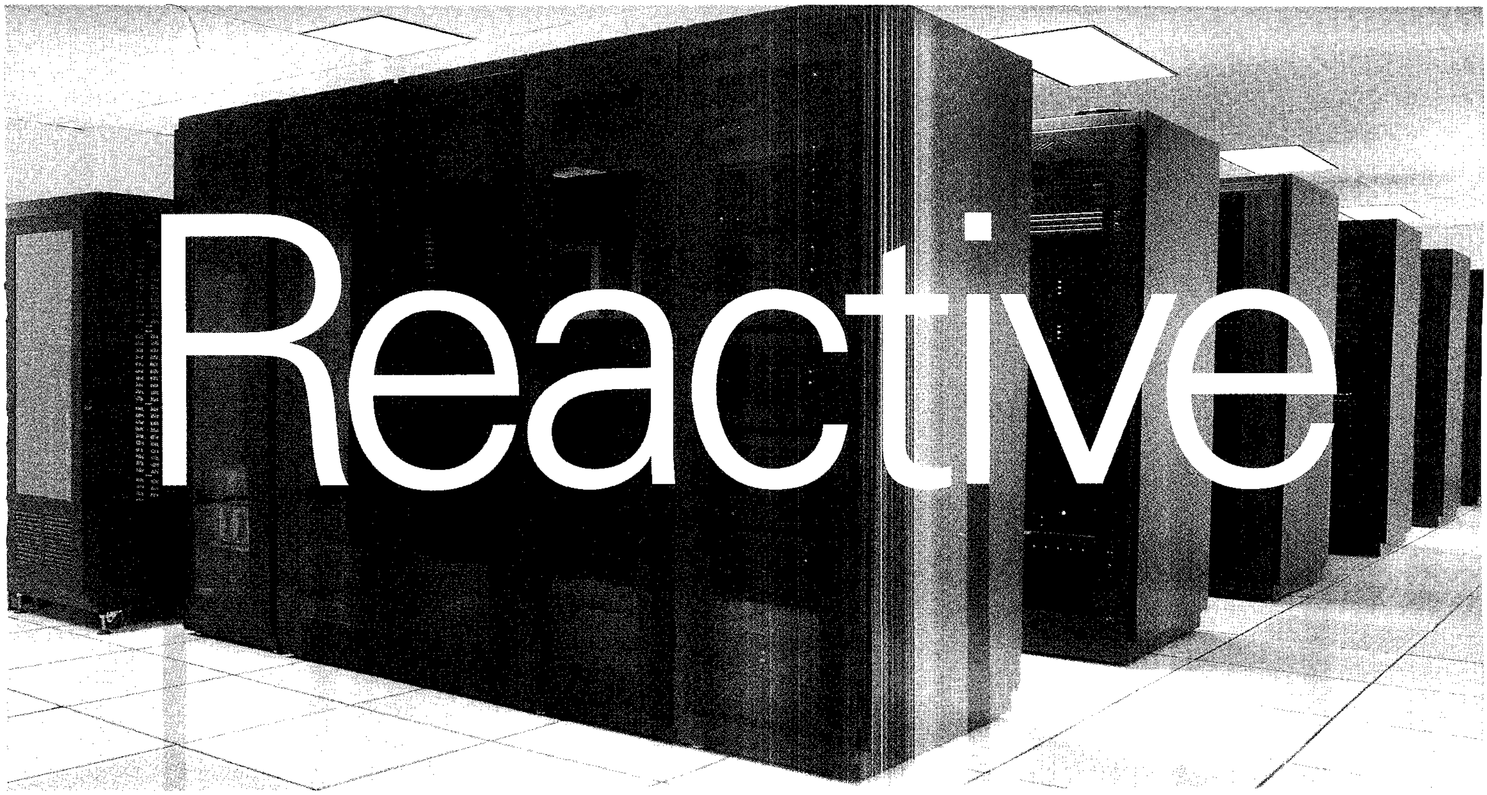
Today's boat gag would mark the end of that sequence. When the Blazer ran over a large bump on the beach trail, the trailer hitch would break free, hurling the boat up into the air. The Ford pickup, practically tailgating, would smash right into it. The collision would provide the mother and son with a brief moment of false hope.

Hymes, a slim man of forty-nine with a square jaw, high cheekbones, and an Old West profile (he could pass for Robert Redford in a long shot), was wearing shorts, a knee brace, and an Israeli special-forces baseball hat. He is a former stuntman who came to the job from championship motocross racing. Stuntmen rarely come out of the circus or rodeo anymore; these days, you're more likely to find ex-X-Gamers and converts from renegade sports like snowboarding and cliff diving. Still, Hymes's motorcycle background remains the stunt driver's gold standard; both disciplines require frequent power slides and a precise calculation of risk at high speed. Even though he's now at the top of his profession—Hymes designed the famous bus jump in "Speed"—he thinks his father would have preferred it if he were more like his two cousins, the accountant and the lawyer. He calls himself the black sheep of the family.

In fact, Hymes is merely embracing tradition: his grandfather was one of the original stuntmen at the Mack Sennett studios. Ask stuntpeople how they got into the business and they'll usually say, "I fell into it." The truth is that a hefty percentage are born into it. There have been at least twelve Eppers in the stunt business, all of them descended from a Swiss cavalryman who was delivering horses to M-G-M just when a director needed somebody to jump one over a moving car. There are stunt couples, stunt brothers and sisters, stunt grandmas and grandpas—even, apparently, stunt babies. When I asked Hymes about his first big break as a stunt coordinator and he mentioned "The Untouchables," I told him how much I liked the scene with the baby in the carriage rolling down the train-station stairs.

"That's my oldest boy, Collin!" Hymes said proudly. "He was eighteen months old at the time, and he loved it. As long as we were bouncing down the stairs, he was laughing and just thought it was great."

Hymes, who held the handles of the baby carriage throughout the filming, was trying to hit upon the same combination for today's boat gag: the illusion of danger with a guarantee of safety. Throughout the morning, as the director prepped for filming, Hymes kept coming over to the dogleg on the beach, where the landscaping crew was adding greenery along the sandy trail. While they worked, Hymes plotted camera angles. He went over the timing and the possible outcomes. Hymes envisioned that, just when the Blazer and the trailer hitch hit the bumps, a crew member would press a detonator and a charge of primer cord would detach the trailer from the S.U.V. Thinking aloud to an assistant, Hymes said, "Then the boat



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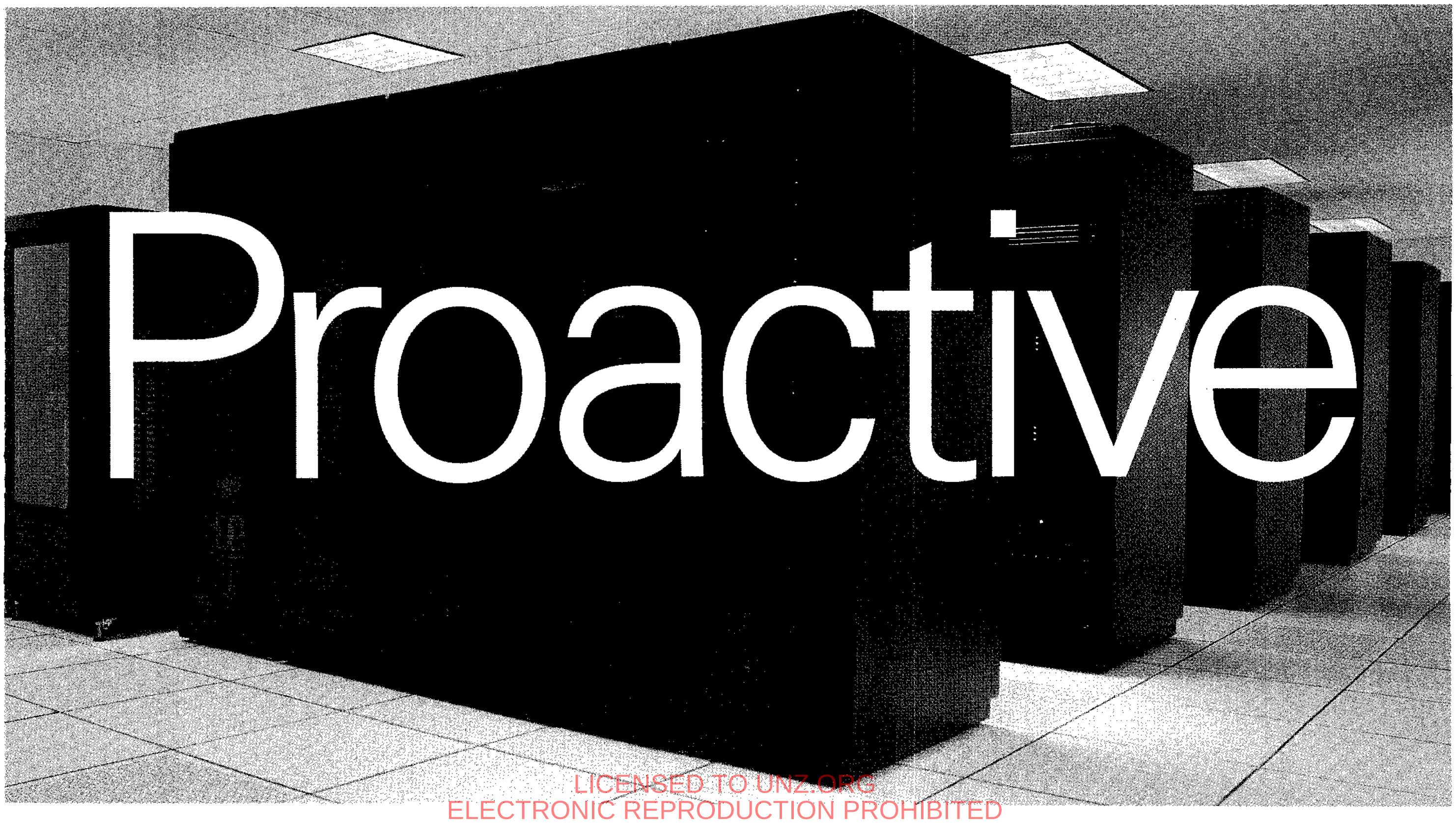

and trailer should—maybe it'll dig in its nose. Maybe it'll cartwheel. Who knows?" He paced back and forth over the patch of prepared ground. "All I know is, it'll be a wreck."

It's impossible to eliminate chance from a stunt—Hymes and his crew were planning an accident, after all—but Hymes kept going over every detail of the scenario. He called in Donna Evans, the stunt double for the mother, and Sean Graham, the hit-man stunt double who would drive the Ford pickup, and went over the scene again. Hymes wondered whether he should replace the truck's glass windshield with one made of Lexan, a high-impact clear plastic used in race cars, in order to protect Graham. He decided to have the outboard motor carefully tied down so that it couldn't fly off. Then he had the mechanics take out the motor's insides, to make it lighter and less dangerous in case it actually did. Graham stood by, appreciatively watching the preparation. "This one's going to be a fart-knocker," he said.

Graham, who is one of the three hundred or so stuntpeople who work steadily and earn several hundred thousand dollars a year, is a former cliff diver and extreme snowboarder who has turned himself into one of the industry's top wheelmen. (He did Mark Wahlberg's driving in "The Italian Job.") Graham's specialty, the high fall, is an all-or-nothing gag: you don't break a leg or crack a rib if you miss; you either hit the air bag and live or you don't. So high-fall guys are meticulous about preparation.

Graham is a gag man's gag man, who keeps the stunt doubles laughing while they're waiting out the downtime under the shade trees. But when I asked him to confirm certain stories I'd heard—of stuntmen racing their rental cars, power-sliding into the hotel parking lot, and then rappelling out of their hotel-room balconies—Graham said that he took a Stanislavsky approach. "The more time we spend honing our craft, the better it's going to look in the movie," he said. "It's our job, as professionals, to try to eke out a little extra time with the equipment to physically prepare."

The way Graham looks at it, you're more likely to die from mistakes than from daring. In the 1923 cliffhanger "Plunder," the first-time stuntman Johnny Stevenson jumped off a New York bus toward an elevated track at Seventy-second Street and Third Avenue; according to "Stunt," a book by John Baxter, the bus driver drove faster than was planned, and Stevenson missed the girder; he fell to his death in front of his wife and daughter, who were playing extras on the bus. In the 1977 biker flick "Hi-Riders," Vic Rivers successfully drove his car off a bridge and did a rollover in a three-foot streambed; he climbed out of his car but grew dizzy and fell in the muddy water and drowned. A year later, on the set of "Steel," A. J. Bakunas successfully landed a record high fall; then the seams on his air bag broke, and he was killed. Stuntmen defy death so regularly that their own tragic deaths under relatively normal circumstances—like those of Dick Bullock and Jack Coffer, who died in car accidents on the way home from work, or Gene Coogan, who fell asleep in bed with a cigarette—can seem almost ironic, like one last gag.

"When I was your age, our nannies had to carry backpacks."

At 5 P.M., the stunt was ready to film, and Hymes began scrutinizing the final camera setups. Two cameras were hidden by palm trees that the landscaping crew had installed just beyond the bumps; another was situated on a forty-yard dolly that ran parallel to the path of the cars; one was placed on the front seat of the Ford truck that Graham would drive; and one was on the ground, tucked behind another artful set of plantings. Hymes, satisfied with the arrangement, signed off on it.

Graham looked at me and said, "The number of cameras they have on this tells me they don't want to do it more than once." After a few minutes, I saw him putting some things into his pocket, and I asked him about them. "Whenever I have a big stunt to do, I keep these with me," he said. "Although this isn't that big a jump, allegedly." He showed me a laminated picture of him and his wife, Tabby, who is a stunt double for Julia Roberts, with their sixteen-month-old son; a tiny angel that Tabby gave him for these occasions; and a medal that his grandfather used to keep in his car. "He was the original bad-ass," Graham said. "No fear."

The sky was darkening with late-afternoon thunderclouds, so Hymes called a quick safety meeting. It boiled down to this: "Nobody, for any reason, should be in this area." As Hymes spoke, Graham performed martial-arts stretches on top of the biggest sand bump.

During the rigging and the other preparations, the Blazer and the Ford pickup had been resting just feet away from where the gag would take place. Now Graham, with his team of hit men harnessed in, backed the pickup

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around the bend in the dogleg, just out of sight. Then Evans backed the Chevy Blazer up to her starting point, a few yards ahead of Graham; she sat next to a man who was four feet six, cursed like a dockworker, and specialized in doubling for child actors. Hymes sat by the monitors and spoke into his walkie-talkie. All the walkie-talkies up and down the beach were tuned to the same channel, so Hymes's voice, and Evans's and Graham's answers, echoed behind the dunes, up on the hill, out in the parking lot, and down by the cameras.

"Donna? Set?"

"Set."

"Donna's set. Sean?"

"We're set back here."

"Going hot on the set. *Action!*"

Evans's Blazer came bouncing around the corner at thirty-five miles an hour—the speed they'd settled on—with Graham just inches off her trailer, gauging his speed by hers. Thirty-five looked pretty fast on the rugged terrain. When the Blazer hit the bump, the trailer hitch detached right on cue and the boat went airborne.

This is where Graham's skill came into play. He needed to stay close enough to slam into the boat, but he had to keep a slight separation, too—so that he could see what the boat wound up doing in the air, and then steer into it. All of this happened within milliseconds: as the Blazer and the boat took to the air, Graham, right behind them, punched the accelerator and took off from the bump even faster than Evans had. Both the Ford and the boat were in the air—the truck ascending, the boat descending.

The boat, it turned out, didn't do any of the things the crew thought it would. It didn't cartwheel. It didn't dig its nose into the ground. It rose almost lazily upward in a movement that Graham might recall from his cliff-diving days: the layout. And in that classic face-up, flat-out position the boat came slamming down on the truck, hitting the hood and the windshield at the same instant. The camera rigged to the seat beside Graham captured the windshield breaking on impact.

At this point, the only thing Graham could control was the steering wheel. What happened next was truly odd. It looked almost as if the truck were tackling the boat—still moving forward, the Ford hurtled into the boat's metal keel and knocked it sideways, causing the entire boat to tumble off the passenger side and hit a palm tree on the edge of the sandy path. Evans sped off as planned and, despite all the chaos in the air, when Graham hit the ground he braked and came to a stop right on his mark. Hymes called, "Cut!"

After the fire gag, the crew had cheered and applauded. This time, the celebration was quieter: it was the difference between one spectacular thing going right and many little ones not going horribly wrong. The crew rushed over and huddled by the monitors, watching the scene again and again as Hymes compared each camera's account. A few—one side angle and a head-on shot—had it all wrong: they minimized the danger and underplayed the collision of the two airborne vehicles. The cars looked slow, the crash seemed humdrum. Evans appeared almost distraught as she watched them: although it wasn't coming across onscreen, she knew that the Blazer had taken off and landed hard. Finally, one low angle confirmed her version—the Blazer roared up into the air, Evel Knievel style, and shook hard as it hit the sand—and she practically shouted, "That's what happened!"

But the low angle missed a detail that the dolly shot had recorded: after the boat slammed into the windshield, it slid back over the cab of the truck and almost smacked into the bald head of one of the hit men as he ducked. From this angle, you could see exactly where the fall of the boat and the rise of the pickup truck intersected. And in those one or two frames where the boat stopped, froze in midair, and changed direction you could also spot how small the clearance was between the bottom of the boat and the skull of the stunt double—a matter of inches. The first time the crew saw this rendering on the monitors, you could hear them sucking in their breath, wincing at the close call.

Hymes, however, reacted with relief. "That's the one," he said. At his request, the script supervisor recorded which camera had captured the shot. That was a print. ♦

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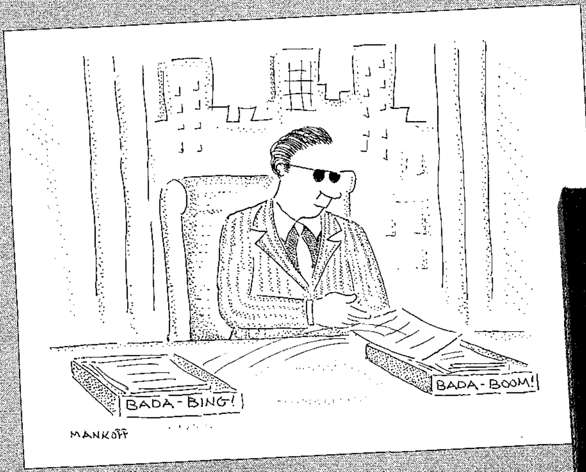
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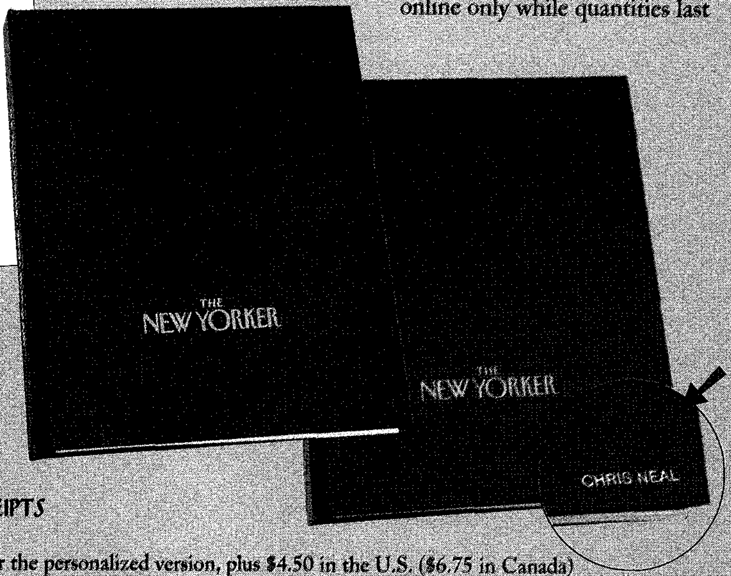
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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

YOUR FACE IN LIGHTS

The secrets of cinematography.

BY ALEC WILKINSON

Movies intently depict the play of emotion on the human face. "Unless you're simply destroying things, eighty per cent of what we do is closeups or medium shots of the human face," a cameraman told me. Movie cameras customarily record their subjects at an angle. An object filmed from straight in front appears to be flat. A cube from straight on is a square. A movement to the left or right reveals a second side. A shift up or down shows another. No angle can include more than three sides. Absent the effect of light, the vantage that shows the greatest complexity is typically the most flattering.

Light is to movies what perspective is to paintings—the device that persuades the eye that a flat and vertical surface is also deep. A face filmed from directly in front will also seem to be flat, especially if the light falls on it evenly. This circumstance is usually favorable for an older actress, because it obscures imperfections; the cheeks become smooth. To be filmed indoors sympathetically, a face needs to be lit by more than one light. A cameraman will often place a small light called a catch light close to the camera's lens. The catch light will be reflected in the actress's eyes. A face with no light in the eyes will seem remote, abstracted, the face of someone it is difficult to feel a connection with.

Cameramen provide tension by means of the angle at which they light a character. We absorb images from left to right, the same way we read. Looking at a face that is lit from the left side is "restful," another cameraman told me. Lighting against the grain—from the right, that is—introduces a discordance. Light from below distorts a face: unnatural shadows appear; horror films and monster movies often have bottom lighting. Light from the top makes a face appear gaunt. The eyes go dark. The actor will look like a figure in a mental institution or maybe as if he were dangerous. To make Marlon Brando appear threatening and enigmatic in "The Godfather," the cameraman lit him from above. Among the other specialty lights specific to the face are kick lights and hair lights. Kick lights are used from behind an actor to show the grain and shape of the face. They are commonly used in heman movies, to illuminate sweat on an actor's cheeks; Sylvester Stallone uses kick lights a lot. A cameraman who is filming an actor with dark hair against a dark background and who doesn't want to see only the actor's face can use a hair light to make his hair stand out. In the studio days, cameramen used to light the faces of stars with more intensity than anyone else's. If there was a hundred-watt bulb on one actor, there would be a hundred-and-ten-watt bulb on the star.

One producer told Roger Pratt, "Light the women well, and you'll have a long career."

TOMER HANUKA

To observe the effect of light on an actress's face, one might note in "The End of the Affair" the difference between Julianne Moore's appearance in the grip of sexual excitement and as a pallid figure on her deathbed. The cameraman was a British cinematographer named Roger Pratt. Pratt is admired for his perhaps unexampled ability to light the faces of women and photograph them to their best advantage.

"A large part of cinema is photographing women," David Hare told me, "and yet there are plenty of cameramen who can't do it." Hare and Pratt worked together, in 1987, on Hare's film "Paris by Night." "In 'Paris by Night,' we had Charlotte Rampling, about whom it is said that it is impossible to take an unflattering picture," Hare went on. "Well, it *is* possible to take an unflattering picture of her. Roger playing with the light on

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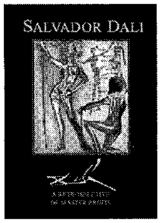

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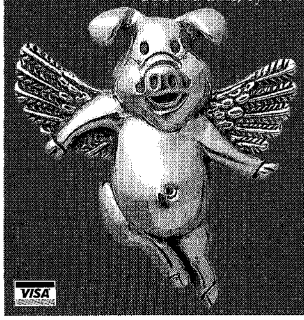

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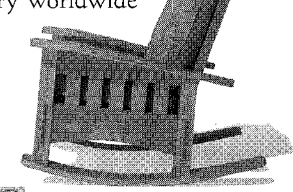

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her face was like a child completely engaged."

Chuck Finch, the gaffer whom Pratt works with most often, says, "When Roger lights a woman, he looks to see if she has any imperfections, and he corrects them by using lights. We've lit some really top-looking women, and he always does a really good job."

Pratt was at work last summer—in Malta, England, and Mexico—on "Troy," which stars Brad Pitt and is based mostly on the Iliad. It is being directed by Wolfgang Petersen. When I asked Petersen about Pratt's ability to light faces, he said, "So much goes through the eyes. Roger takes care of that, especially with Diane Kruger, who plays Helen. To light her in a way so that she comes across not only as beautiful but also as soulful is essential for this picture. You can take fifty thousand soldiers and hundreds of ships, but if you're not really moved by what the actors do it doesn't succeed."

Before lighting an actress's face, Pratt asks which side of her profile she prefers to have filmed. A producer on his first movie told him, "Light the women well, and you'll have a long career."

What I know about cinematography comes mostly from talking with cameramen such as Emmanuel Lubezki, Allen Daviau, John Bailey, Roger Deakins, and John Toll; from reading "Painting with Light," by the cameraman John Alton; and from spending eight days in Mexico with Pratt.

"Troy" was filmed outside Cabo San Lucas, at the southern end of Baja California. From the hotels by the ocean where the cast and crew stayed, you drove through the town, past car washes and gas stations and cantinas and stores and empty lots with wrecked cars, along the coast several miles to a rutty dirt road through a shacky neighborhood of tin-roofed cinder-block houses, some with red-and-black shawls for doors, past dirt yards scuffed to the texture of a floor, past scrawny dogs, and children with coal-black hair, past a little barbed-wire gate with a skinny young man who looked proud of his policeman's hat and baggy guard's uniform, then through a landscape of cactus and lizards and snakes to the set. Pratt would arrive at the set each morning except Sunday at seven and have breakfast. Work began at seven-thirty and lasted until the light failed. To be on schedule, it was necessary that each day produce three or four minutes of useful film.

The Trojan Wall, a few hundred feet across, with huge doors in the center, had been built on gently sloping ground about a mile back from the ocean, and the Temple of Apollo had been built on the beach. Bulldozers swept the beach clear of footprints. The Trojan Wall was held up from behind by scaffolding. In front of the wall were the actors and the cameras and tents for makeup and wardrobe and first aid and catering and taking care of the actors' spears and shields. Behind the wall were huge tents for the cafeteria and more wardrobe and makeup and the actors' trailers and the parking lot.

The cast included a thousand Mexicans dressed as soldiers, who were filmed at some distance, and two hundred and fifty-two men from a sports club in Bulgaria, who were employed for closer engagements. The Bulgarians were taller than the Mexicans and more imposing. Everyone liked to be finished with his routine at the hotel health club before the Bulgarians arrived. By the time all the soldiers were in costume and had had their watches removed, it was usually around eleven. Much of the soldiers' day was spent standing in ranks, about fifty across. To fill out the ranks, dummies were placed among them. Mexican men had been hired to supply the soldiers with water. The men carried water cans on their backs, stacks of plastic cups in their hands, and black trash bags attached to their belts. When there was a water break, they sprinted toward the soldiers and travelled along the ranks. The soldiers called out, "Water, water!" On longer breaks, the soldiers sat down in the sun, their eyes turned to slits, and sometimes they slept. At lunchtime, they left their spears and helmets and breastplates in the field, as if they had fled in disarray.

When the picture is finished, thousands of soldiers will appear on the screen, the bulk of them animated. Each time Pratt had the camera pointed at a section of the set that was unoccupied by soldiers, he and Wolfgang Petersen

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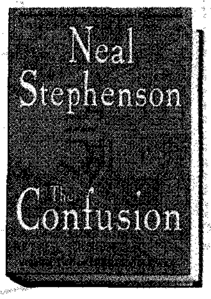
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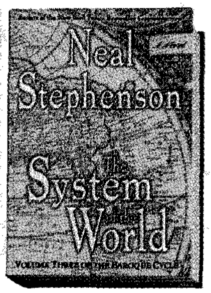
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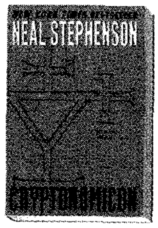
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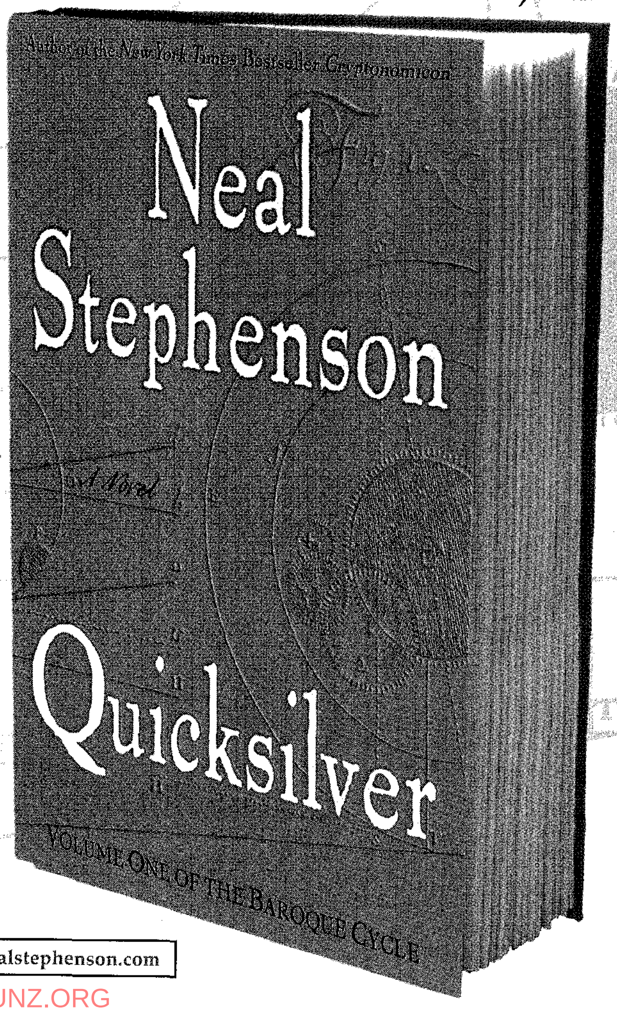
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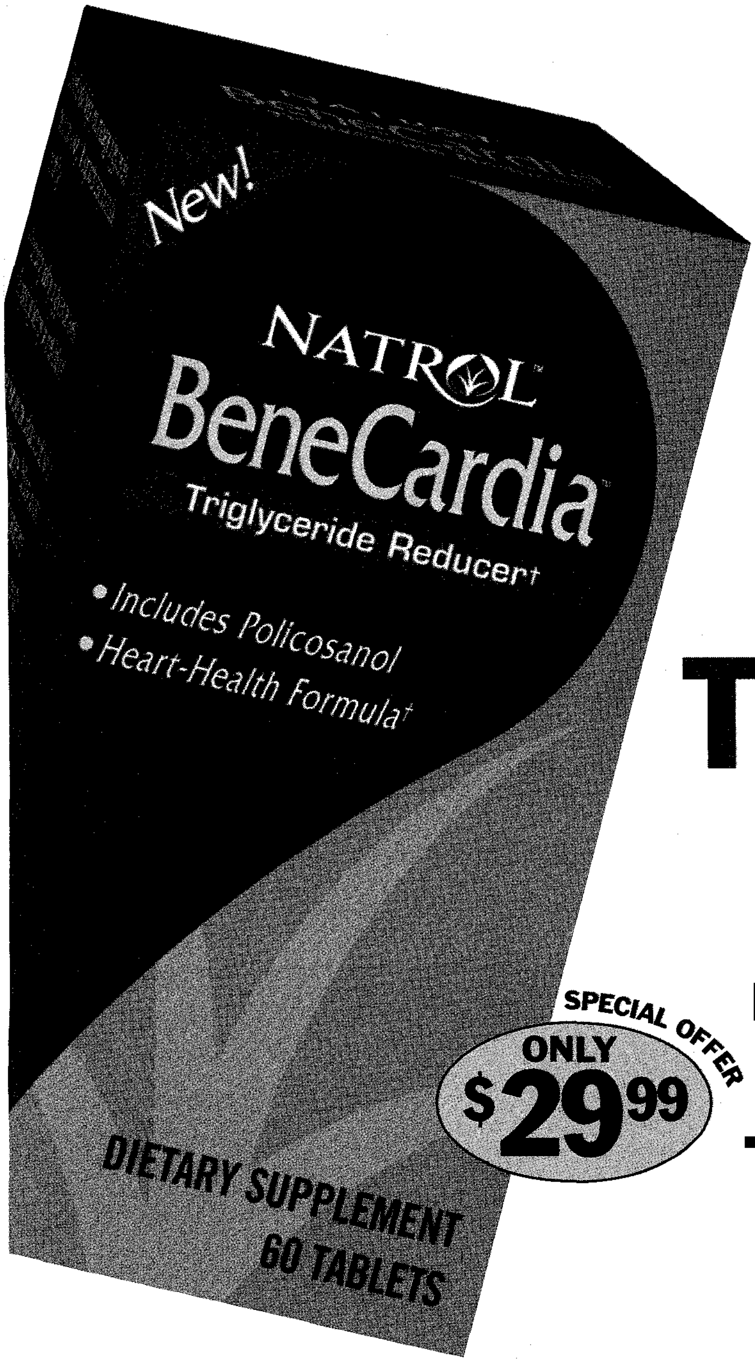
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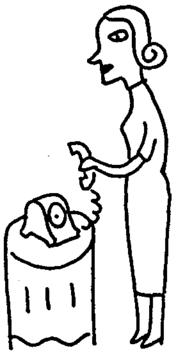
would confer with Nick Davis, the man in charge of special digital effects, about the difficulty and expense of filling the empty part of the screen. Occasionally, Pratt and Petersen would shoot a scene, study it on video monitors, and decide to shoot it again. Pratt would ask Petersen, "Same thing?" and Petersen would say, "Same thing, only more expensive," meaning that the shot would be wider, including more space that would have to be filled.



Pratt usually stood beside the cameras and the actors, and Petersen stood or sat in a tent fifteen or twenty feet away, watching the video screens that showed each camera's shots. "This video business is fantastic," Pratt told me one day. "It's altered the way things are done. The director used to stand by the actors and have eye contact. Now some directors just shout from the tent, 'Act better!' "

The tents were grouped together, like a bazaar. Waiting to be called, the actors stood beneath them, occasionally brushed and stroked and fussed over like show dogs. To prepare a scene, a swordfight, say, a crew would bring a camera from the tents, paying cable across the field like fishing line. The stunt doubles would take the place of the actors so that the cameras could frame them. Then two men would carry over the principal camera, setting it down on a piece of fabric, like a portable altar, and Pratt would lean forward and look into the lens.

Pratt is fifty-six. He was born in Leicester, in the Midlands. His father was a vicar, who taught himself Greek and Latin, and showed religious films in his church during Lent. To Pratt's mother, the honorable professions were teaching, the law, medicine, and social work. Pratt was not a disappointment to her, but she always hoped that eventually he would find a proper job. Since 1980, he has made thirty-two movies, including "Brazil," "Mona Lisa," "Batman," "The Fisher King," "Shadowlands," "Twelve Monkeys," "Iris," and "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets."

Lynda Obst produced "The Fisher King," in 1991, which was directed by Terry Gilliam. "In the late eighties and early nineties, you had the camera operator as star," she told me. "There were lots of dazzling cinematographers. You could always see their work, you could see the camera move. Wow, look at the camera move! There were also the star lighting cameramen—they'll relight the sky. They'll light for hours and hours to make everything look like the magic hour. What I saw with Roger is that he could give you the same dazzling effects, and the same perspectives, without the extra time and without showing the moves. He will give to an hour-and-a-half lighting setup the same magic quality that takes others all day to deliver, and he has tricks up his sleeve to give compelling magical effects in a minute. He can get all the beauty without having been the one who's running the set.

"Some of these techniques he's sidestepping are really expensive," she went on. "Roger is like Mr. Science. He's innovative, and he doesn't try to make himself look like a genius. A lot of guys don't like him for doing this, because he demystifies the craft, but he doesn't care about that. The mystery is within him."

Pratt has an oval face, like an upside-down egg, and a fringe of reddish-brown hair. He has a thin beard. His skin is pale. Under the Mexican sun, his face had turned red, as if he had been climbing stairs. At the corners of his eyes are spiky creases that remained white—they looked like war paint. His carriage is so erect that it is as if his arms had been pinned back. Around the set, he wore shorts and a short-sleeved shirt with a floppy hat and a red bandanna around his neck. When he had to speak to a person some distance from where he was, he unfurled a small black umbrella. Standing beside the person, he held the umbrella over both of them. When we talked, he would usually sit at an angle to me, and look at me askance, which gave the impression of a bird or an animal leaving open a path for escape. He wasn't evasive. He simply seemed perplexed that anyone was interested. Terry Gilliam told me, "Roger finds it embarrassing to talk about what he does. The big names make quite a deal of it, but that's not like him. He stays just under the

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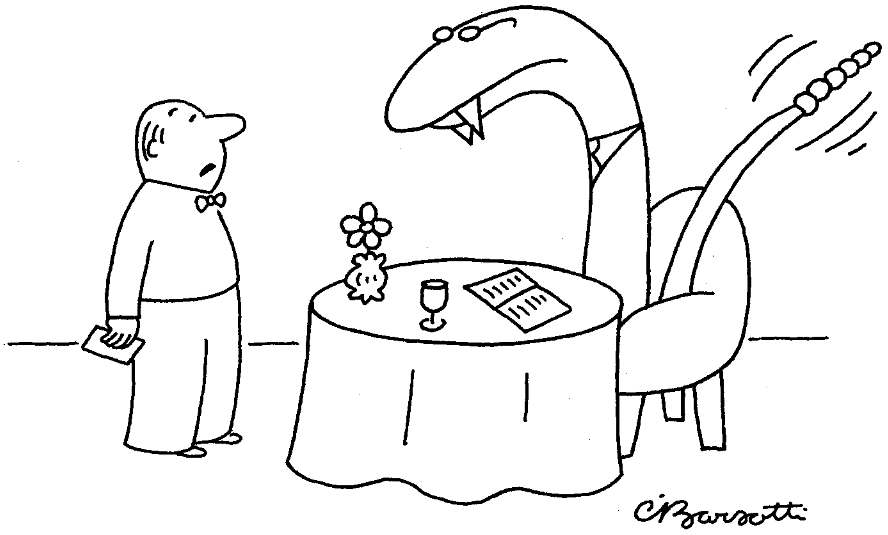

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radar. He does his work. If he's anything, he's too self-deprecating."

"The job is such a practical one, really," Pratt told me. "That's always been most in my mind. It's such an expensive hobby, making films, an expensive hobby and full of very strong egos all around the line, so the idea of living like a painter who could struggle in a garret and do exactly what you want if you could live off a dollar a day goes out the window. Pictures run on the iron rails, everybody serves the beast. They have stopped films in the first couple of weeks, but it's highly unusual. It's typically an unstoppable machine that every director is striving to ride. All the pressures and interests are at stake. Unlike writing a novel or painting a picture, this work has nothing self-motivated and controlling about it. I'm just trying to ease off from the idea that I could turn up on a set and control the way things look, according to my personal aesthetic."

Pratt is fond of lighting techniques used in black-and-white movies—the employment, that is, of light to convey mood and to separate objects from each other. In a black-and-white movie, a man in a dark suit against a dark background would be lost. To be seen, he would have to be lit from behind, so that light appears as a border on his shoulders and arms. In a color movie, a cameraman would probably light the suit, making it brighter than what was behind the man. "All it's about is that it's a two-dimensional medium, isn't it, film?" Pratt said. "To make it three-dimensional, there are tricks of lighting and lenses and where you photograph from. Picking out objects one against another would seem to be easy, but I would rather do it by tonal separation. The black-and-white sky has tones of gray from white to black—that's all you have to play with. Black-and-white photography got to such heights and then color came in, and it's as if people forgot all they had learned."

Black-and-white lighting techniques were abandoned because color film initially needed so much more light to register an image than black-and-white film did. In early color films, in "Singin' in the Rain," for example, there are so many lights being used that when several characters come together in the center of the image there are shadows all over the place. The most unnatural film lighting is employed by television comedies. The set is usually so thoroughly lit that there are no shadows at all. It is impossible to tell where the light is coming from. Along with many other cameramen, Pratt likes having one source of light and one shadow, the way the sun and the full moon work. His idea of perfect light is the kind in the painting by Georges de La Tour, the seventeenth-century French painter, that depicts a man sitting at a table

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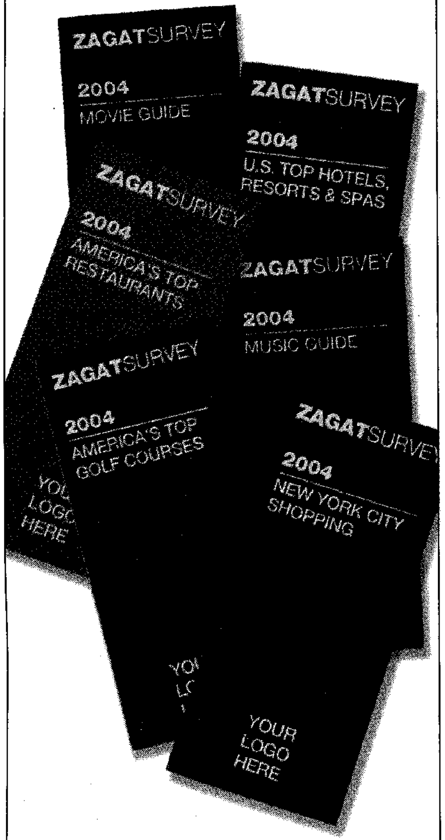

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with a candle on it. "The light comes from the center of the picture and falls off toward the edges," Pratt told me. "All the references are absolutely right. The candle as La Tour painted it would do its own work—he could observe its effects and copy them. For us, it's not so easy; it means a big lamp belting from somewhere up near the ceiling. If you use candlelight, you get a flame, a hugely underexposed candle, and a fairly underexposed image of the people around it.

"The trouble with the eye is it's fixed to the brain," he went on. "It's very sophisticated in terms of focus and what it's reading. When an eye looks at a face, it has a brain reference for the tone and color it should have. If you were standing in a supermarket with fluorescent lights above you, your eye would compare what it sees with all the other images of the kind it has seen before and is familiar with. If you put a camera in there, everyone you photographed would be green, because of the nature of fluorescent light. A camera is a much blunter instrument, without an inventory of references."

According to Pratt, moonlight is the most challenging fabrication that appears commonly in movies. "It's so difficult to achieve that cameramen are sometimes judged by their ability to simulate it," he says. One reason moonlight is difficult is that it involves creating a circumstance that is contrary to fact. In a room in a movie where moonlight comes through a window, we see dark shadows and soft colors. The light must be dark enough to suggest night but also contain sufficient illumination so that what needs to be seen can be seen. In a real room lit by the moon, we see mostly in black-and-white. On a huge landscape, the light, to be convincing, must fall with the same intensity on an actor in the foreground as it does on the trees or the hills or the sand dunes in the background. Unless intercepted by clouds, actual moonlight is uniform.

Moonlight cannot easily be slipped into a movie. It can't be subtle or peripheral. It pervades the frame. It insists that we take note of it. Because we have seen the approximations of it often enough, the conclusion we arrive at is not "That's moonlight" but "That's moonlight in a movie." Perhaps by the equator the full moon glows resonantly enough so that one could use it to film, but it doesn't anywhere else. Movie moonlight is usually a blue light that is intentionally cold and uniform—that is, not filled in—and with the shadows left as shadows instead of being lit for definition. In the least artfully lit rooms, someone turns off the lights and the room becomes brighter than it was when the lights were on.

Moonlight in a movie requires more equipment than any other conventional effect. It is most often created using enormous lights on cranes some distance from the set, perhaps a hundred yards. When the area to be lit is capacious, the lights are sometimes a quarter mile away from the far reaches of the set. The lights most widely used to replicate moonlight are called Musco lights. Musco lights were invented to light stadiums and car racetracks that had no permanent illumination.

Twenty-five years ago, it was very difficult to duplicate moonlight mechanically. It had to be done in the laboratory. Moonlight scenes in old Westerns, for example, would be shot during the day and underexposed. The process is called "day for night." Day for night is still used occasionally, to save money or for some other practical reason. A practical reason to use day for night might be to film a big landscape that would require too many lights or a moonlit scene on the ocean. You can't really put a crane and Musco lights out on the ocean, not cheaply, anyway. Filming day for night involves using enormous amounts of light to overcome the effect of the sun on the actors' faces, to make the light appear even, that is. Sometimes so much light is pumped onto the actors' faces to compensate that it becomes painful. They wear contact lenses that have been darkened to resemble sunglasses.

The other nighttime effect that Pratt often replicates is firelight. "Troy" has a lot of torchlit scenes, which, along with the moonlit scenes, were filmed in Malta. "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets" also has a lot of torchlit scenes. Pratt describes it as "a very flambeaux movie." He and his crew produce the twitchy quality of firelight by means of a device they call a flame box, a strobe

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light operated according to a computer program written by Pratt and Chuck Finch with the help of an assistant. Pratt told me that Finch understood more of the technical elements of the flame box. When I asked Finch how it worked, he looked at me as if I were simple and said, “I can’t tell you that, can I. Then everyone would know.”

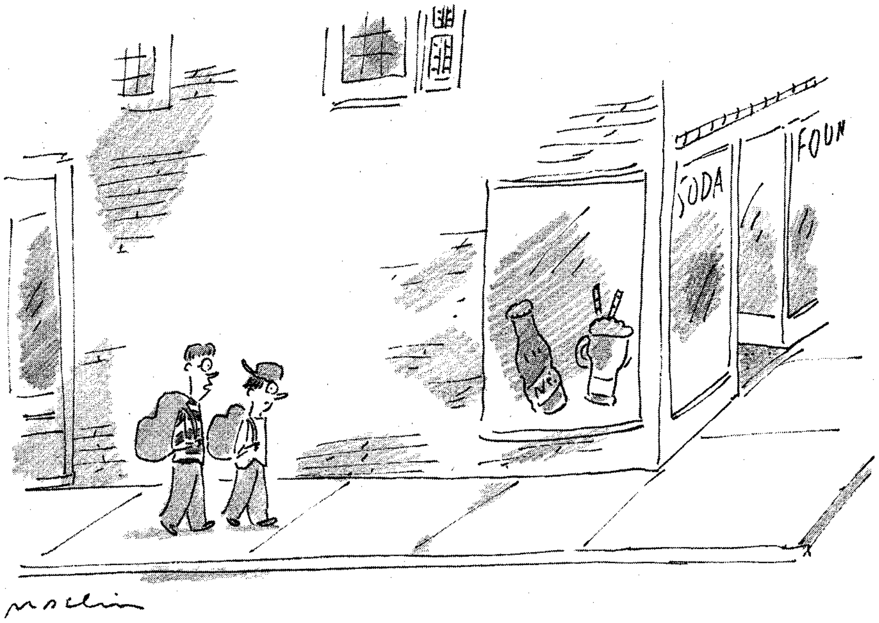
Cameramen have traditionally been tinkerers, gadget guys, back-yard rocket scientists. They like refining ideas—“What if you take this light and put it on the back of a truck, or make it hydraulic, or fix a camera on a crane and work it with remote controls?” They like savoring a problem that requires a novel technical solution. When one of them stumbles on a new procedure or device, they all notice. Pretty much every cameraman who saw “Rocky” in the theatre noted the long shot in which Sylvester Stallone climbs the steps of the museum and turns and looks back at where he came from. No camera they were aware of could manage such a shot. A camera on a crane or a dolly could follow Stallone up the steps, but once he turned around the track would show, and no cameraman running alongside Stallone with a handheld camera could keep the camera level. The shot had been made with a Steadicam, which was invented in Philadelphia by a cameraman named Garrett Brown. Brown was determined to find a way to walk around with a camera and make it as stable as a camera on a dolly.

Cameramen also appreciate accidental discoveries. Filming Robert Blake during “In Cold Blood,” Conrad Hall moved lights around while Blake rehearsed a scene in which, the night before his execution, he recalls his father to a priest. Blake, in shackles, is standing beside a window. It is raining. Hall was trying to find the best means of lighting the rain against the window when he noticed that the shadows of the water running down the windowpane appeared on Blake’s cheek and made Blake look as if he were weeping. One of the many cameramen who called Hall to ask how he had managed the effect was Allen Daviau. Years later, Daviau, filming “The Color Purple,” had a scene in which Whoopi Goldberg’s character was sweeping the floor while engaged in a melancholy reverie about another character. “It’s day, not night,” Daviau told me, “and we’re filming in color, not black-and-white, but I used the reflection of the water on her face. It just felt right to quote him.”

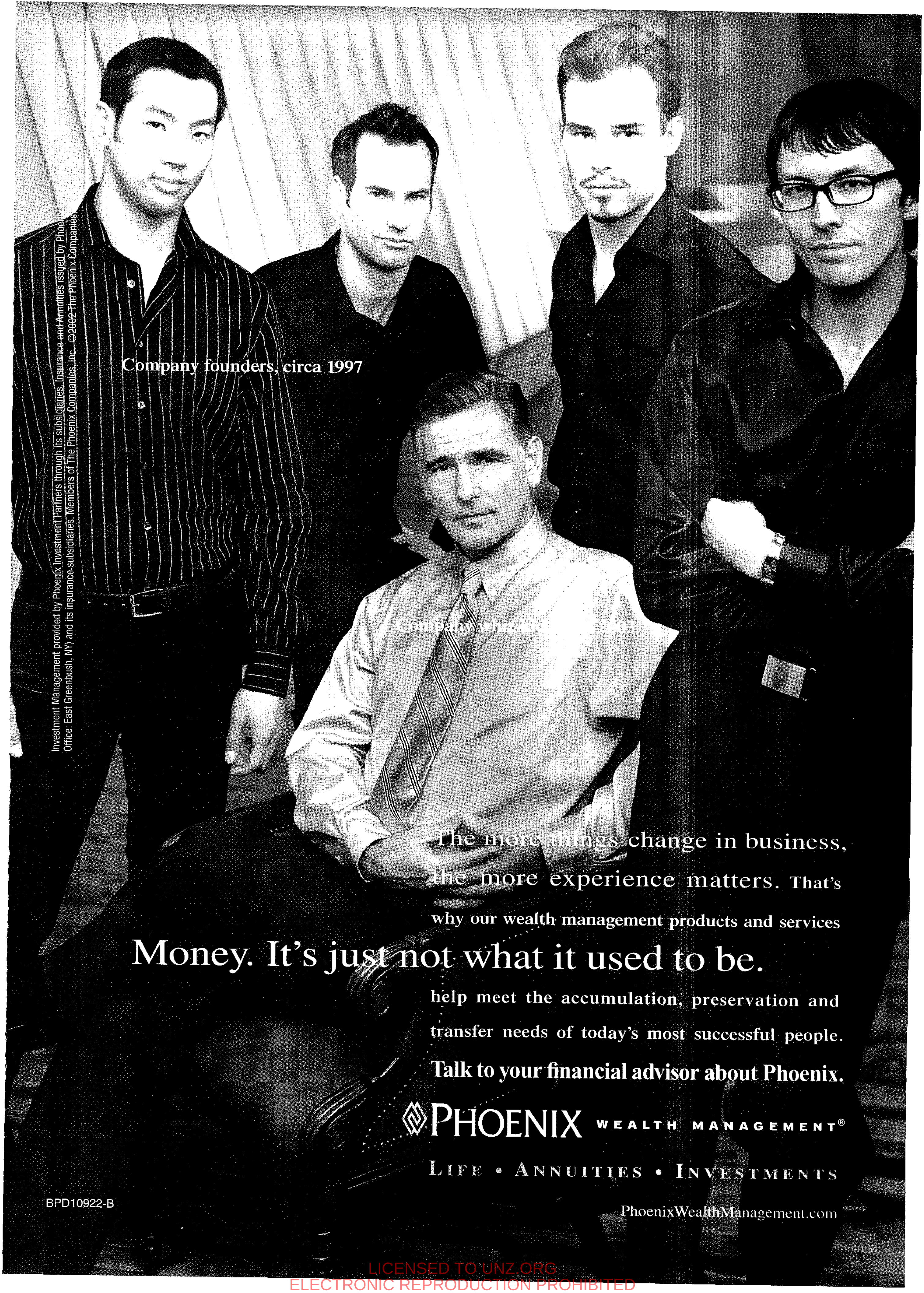
Unless a scene includes a crowd, there are almost always more people behind the camera than on the screen. It is also a peculiarity of the movies that even the simplest effect usually requires a great deal of equipment to bring it about. Early in “The Grapes of Wrath,” Henry Fonda walks through the door of an abandoned house at night. He lights a match. The match appears to be the source of light that illuminates his face and the spooky room as he examines it. In the estimation of the cameraman who described the scene to me, the effect involved perhaps “twenty electricians and twenty grips and about a dozen things happening in about a second and a half—switches being thrown, dimmers applied, lights being turned on and off, and some kind of flame.”

The way the cameraman lights and films an actor conveys to the audience an impression of the character. One cameraman described this to me as underscoring an actor’s performance by giving him “a hallmark look. You can then introduce him later in a picture and the audience will immediately know who he is.” He said that he gives a signature look to a character by observing how the actor moves and by, so far as is possible, lighting him with a consistency, perhaps even placing him often in the same part of the frame: in the foreground if he is an aggressive figure, or perhaps in the middle distance, with space around him, if he is passive, or from slightly below if he is meant to be a looming and threatening presence. By using a consistent light on a character and then changing it, a cameraman can imply that something has changed in the character’s mind, that he has perhaps reached a decision and means to behave differently. Has he always been lit from the right side, and is he now lit from the left? Has he always appeared on the right side of the frame and is he now on the left? Did he always appear to be in brighter light and therefore less mysterious? Even an astute observer is not likely to register the change for what it is, a technical matter, but the effect it conveys will still be felt by the audience.

Any choice a cameraman makes must work within the context of the picture, otherwise the labor will show. If the frame is overdone, is too lush or too pointed in its references, the film will advance slowly. A movie’s unfolding also has something to do with the way the frame is occupied. A cameraman “has a responsibility to use all parts of the screen, to give the eye a



“Don’t tell anybody, but I still believe in the tooth fairy and in the ability of tax cuts to stimulate the economy.”



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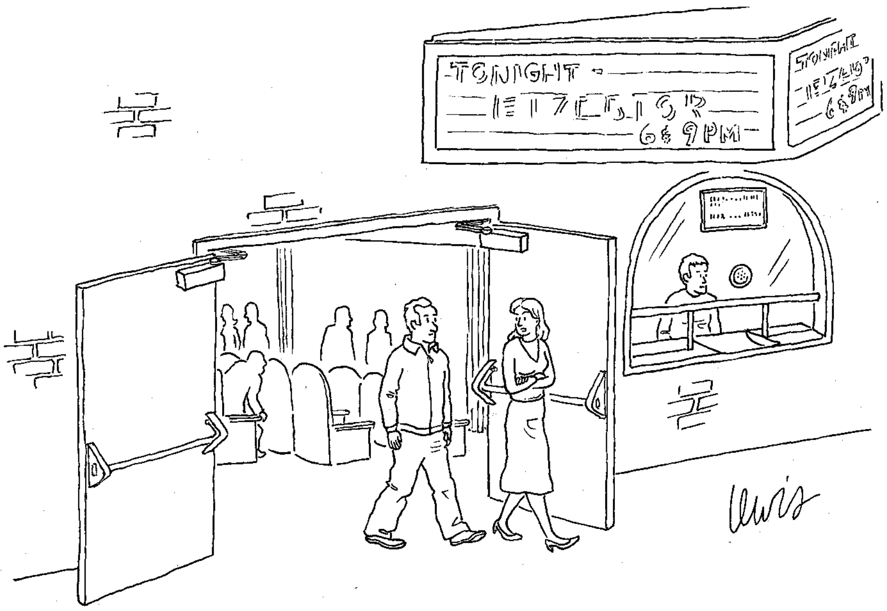


"It strayed too far from the video game."

• •

rhythm of change," one of them told me. Too little variation and the movie will seem static.

One night, I had dinner with Pratt at a French restaurant in the hills above Cabo San Lucas. I asked about the films in his father's church.

" 'Fact and Faith' films, they were called," he said. "Made in the States, I think. Miracles. They were quite frightening, really. They had a kind of scientific bent—'If the world is like this, and contains this and this, then that would mean having a God.' Some were medical—'Isn't it wonderful the body is so complicated, it could only be so because of God.' Very expensively produced, might have been Mormon. The most amazing were ones about the life of Christ. Seeing a man rise from the dead, that was awe-inspiring, really.

"What impressed me most of all is that a mechanical piece of equipment would turn up in the church, along with a piece of film in a tin, and when they were put together, and the lights were turned off, they came to life. How could one add up to the other? How does that series of images translate into something you have an emotion for, especially those films which were upsetting, with people dying and rising again?"

Pratt ordered a Mexican beer, and it sounded really good, so I asked for one, too. "My mother always thought that an hour-and-a-half film took an hour and a half to make," he said. "Till her dying day, she could never figure out what I did with the rest of it."

A waiter took our orders. "My father was a bit of a showman himself," Pratt went on. "I can't think of any other vicars who had films in their church. He was popular and filled a church regularly, which was good, then not so good, because that meant they sent him on to another church, which needed to be resurrected. We had to move from a bucolic village to an inner city. My nought to eight was spent in a country parsonage with a garden and chickens and next door a farmer who plowed with horses. We moved to a very spooky Victorian vicarage in the middle of a bad area, which was a huge blow.

"I went to church as a child, but it wasn't that I was interested in church so much as I identified it as a family effort. It was like you might go help out your father in his job if he was a carpenter, carry him tools on the ladder. School was six days a week, and Sunday was get up and help Dad in the choir or wherever you were needed.

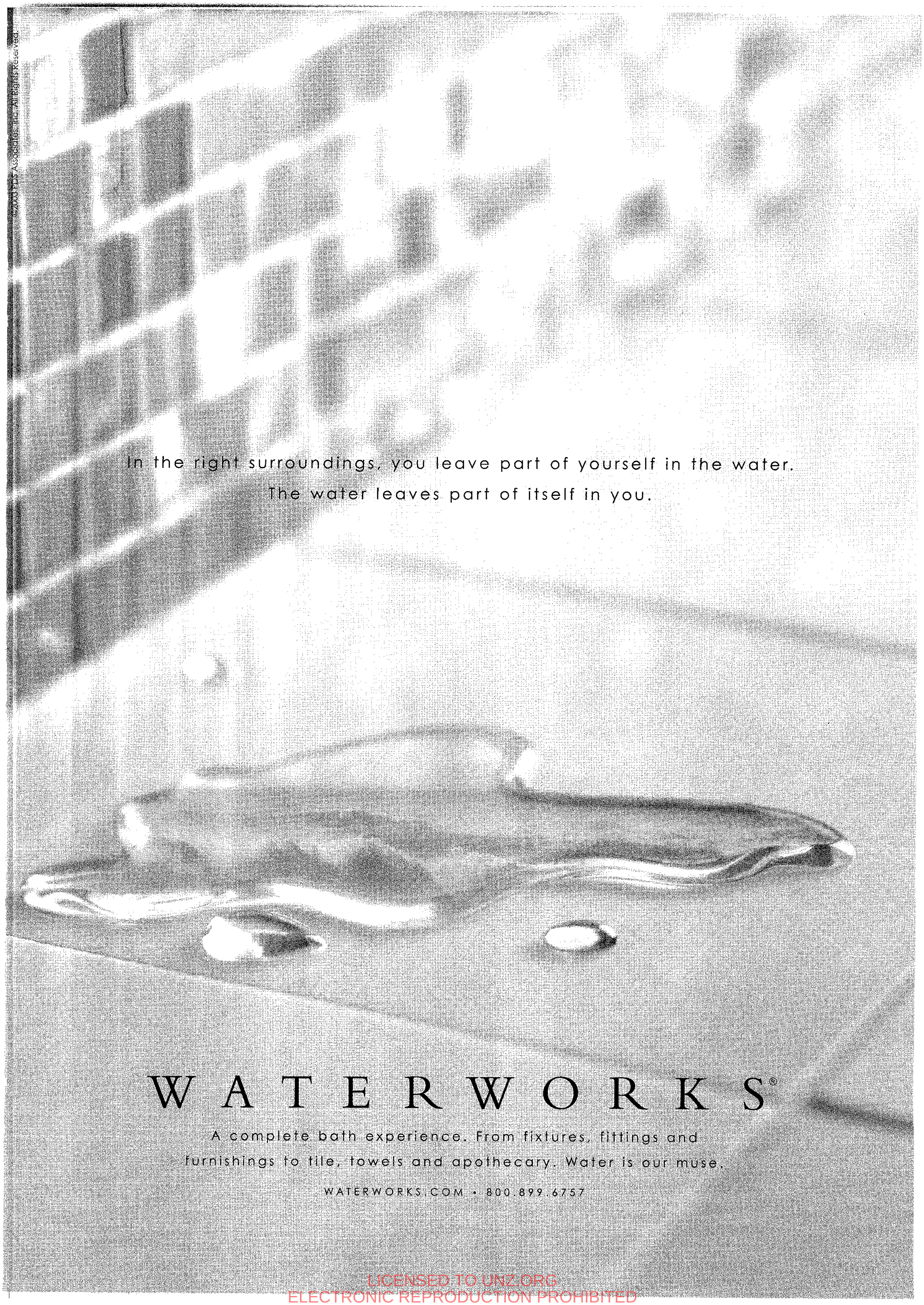
"I was about twenty-one when he died. He had what you call dementia. He was still in his job, and he'd always been very good at preaching; he just used notes, he always could recite the services, and then he started faltering and that's what gave Mother a clue.

"He had really fought hard and long to educate himself, so education was everything to him, and anything less than excellence was unacceptable. In comparison to my brothers, I wasn't a good student. My elder brother, who was a linguist, was a very good pianist as well; there was talk of his pursuing it on the stage. What I was good at is the sciences, but somehow or other the artistic life took hold of me."

I asked Pratt what an objective description of his abilities might be. He thought for a moment. "It's in the area—it could be good, it could be bad—of trying to get the best out of the film for the director," he said. Then he shook his head. "That's too vague," he went on. "There's some D.P.s who embody their aesthetic on whatever film they work on. Sets have to be redesigned, colors changed, costumes changed, schedules changed. When I worked with Terry Gilliam, I had so much faith in what he wanted to do that I struggled to find what he wanted. I wished to fulfill the dream he had, because I knew it was a good dream, as quick as possible."

Pratt shrugged. "People do have the most flowery language to talk about cinematography, the art of it," he said, "but for me there are many problems on a film that have nothing to do with theories of color or highfalutin aesthetics. Because my job is concerned with big lumps of lights and metal cameras and laboratories, it's something that makes half of me very pragmatic; it's the opposite of artistic. I look at myself as a technician. A lot of my time is spent in a chemical factory. That's what a photographic lab is, if you've ever been in one. In England, I would go to the lab early in the morning, before we shoot, to see what the film looks like. It's all dripping chemicals and mixers and trays and tubes everywhere. Photography relies on science. Photography is science, isn't it? Photographs, they're really just chemicals in labs, aren't they? Lights on paper. Images in silver halide. Celluloid. But they turn into live things, like the projector in my father's church, which was inert but had such an effect to convey."

The waiter put the beer on the table, and Pratt sat forward. "Lazarus rising from the dead," he said. "That left a frightening impression." ♦



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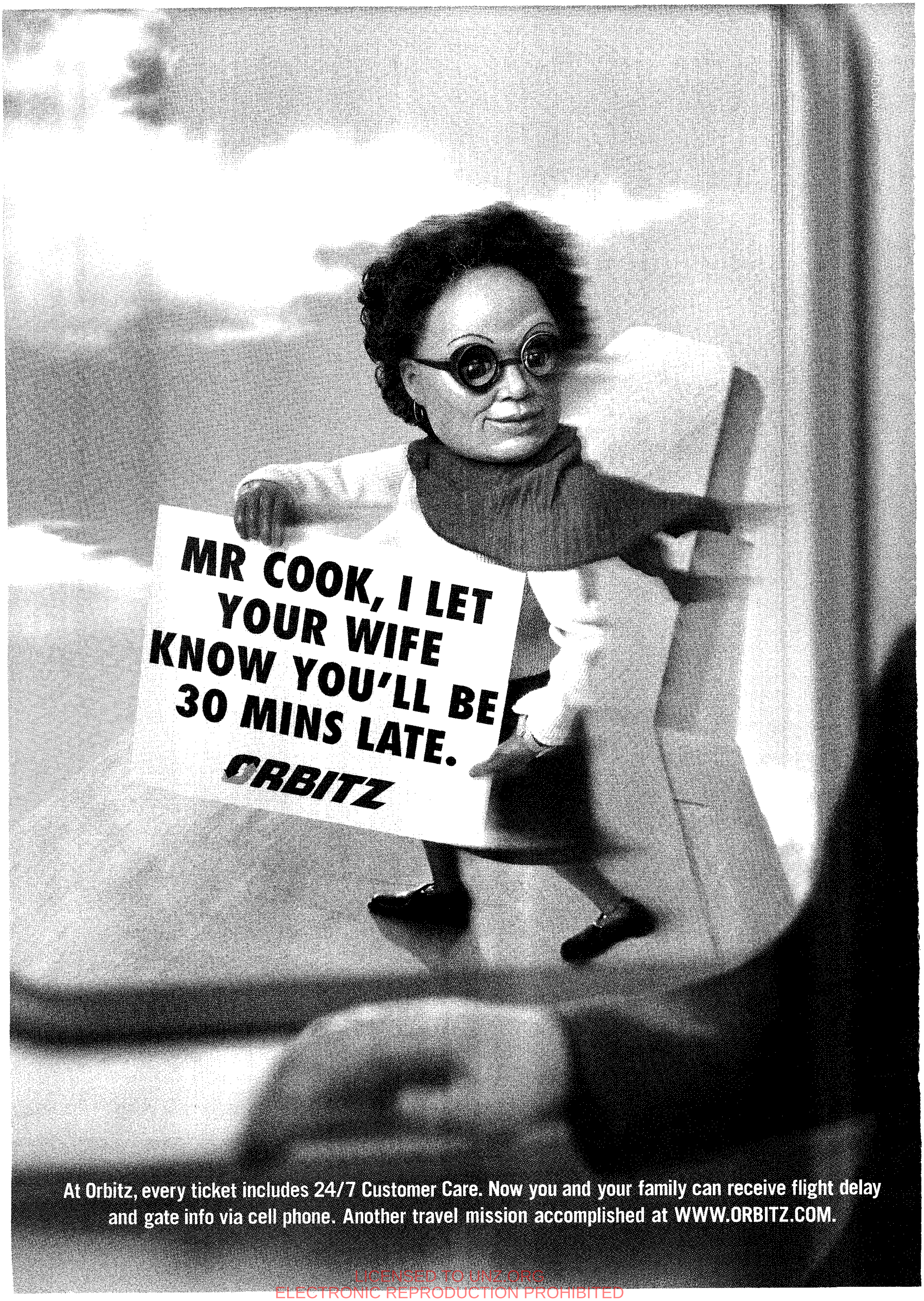

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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

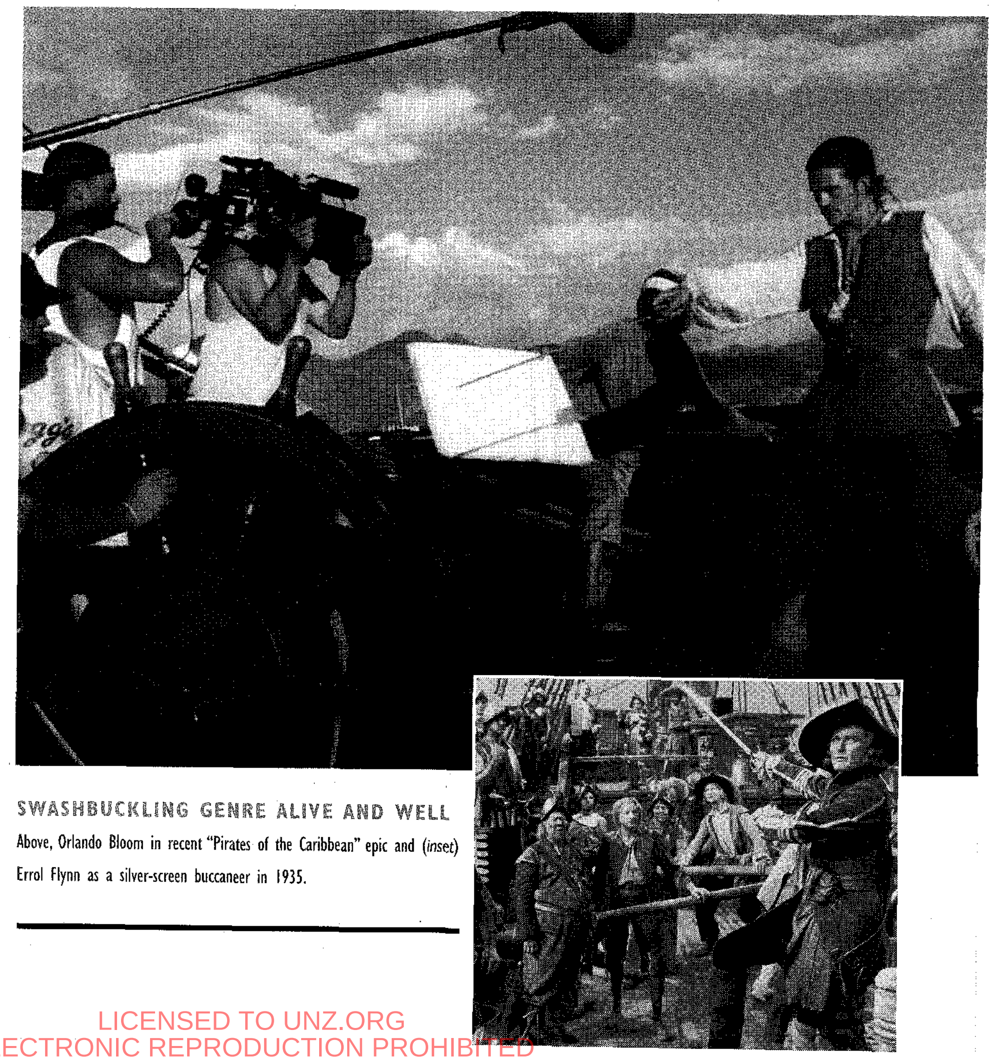
by Richard J. Pietschmann

Islands and movies have long had a romantic relationship. Ever since Errol Flynn spellbound audiences with his swashbuckling portrayal of a buccaneer in "Captain Blood," our cinematic thirst for the seven seas—and the fair damsels awaiting rescue on remote isles—has known no bounds. Johnny Depp's satiric portrayal of a roguish pirate in Disney's recent "Pirates of the Caribbean," (filmed in St. Vincent & the Grenadines) shows that this time-honored formula is alive and well in Hollywood. Just as language is living, so are film scenarios, which can always be repackaged to poke fun at themselves when all else fails. From the evil Dr. Moreau in "Island of Lost Souls" (a 1933 adaptation of an H.G. Wells novel that lived to see two more filmic incarnations) to Marlon Brando's 1962 remake of "Mutiny on the Bounty," beloved movies have returned time and again to focus our attention on beguiling tracts of land surrounded by water.

But why the celluloid fascination with faraway isles? Perhaps an island's clearly defined limits and frequently deserted nature help to articulate heroic themes. There's allegory to be found in a hero's sudden isolation and battle for survival, which can reveal the depths of inner resources or expose ugly truths. John Boorman-directed "Hell in the Pacific" (with Lee Marvin and Toshiro Mifune marooned on Micronesia's Palau Islands) and both adaptations of the William Golding novel, "Lord of the Flies" are films in this genre. Or perhaps the drama of a prisoner's desperate isolation is best exemplified in island films like "Birdman of Alcatraz" or "Papillon." Alternatively, populated islands can be used as microcosms to explore larger societal themes. This strategy is at the core of films such as "Island in the Sun," filmed in Barbados, or "Zorba the Greek" shot in Crete.

Deep-rooted archetypal fears can also be probed and illuminated with island metaphors. Would "Jaws" have been as riveting if it wasn't set in the safe and staid vacation culture of Amity Island, a fictionalized Martha's Vineyard? "South Pacific" surprises us when it morphs into a powerful antiwar message; its idyllic-island ambiance is shattered by the horrific realities of death and dismemberment that lay just beyond the rosy horizon. As movie buffs of the 1933 classic "King Kong" well know, comparing the "primitive" virtues of an island to the glossier advantages of "civilization" usually finds audiences cheering for the former. A picturesque paradise, whether it embodies a meaningful message or is just empty-headed fluff (as in "Club Paradise" or "Weekend at Bernie's II") also helps moviegoers to suspend disbelief and immerse themselves in sun-drenched hedonism. But whether allegorical or metaphorical, scenic, or just plain silly, island-themed films are an entrenched moviemaking convention.

And perhaps, when it comes right down to it, the symbiotic connection between islands and the movies has more to do with advancing the visual storytelling elements at the heart of every film than it does with anything else. Gorgeous landscapes and varied island climes can thrill the senses and awaken the stirrings of wanderlust. And the islands of the planet—whether they're as big as Great Britain or as small as Cayman Brac—provide engrossing backdrops to help move a story along.



SWASHBUCKLING GENRE ALIVE AND WELL

Above, Orlando Bloom in recent "Pirates of the Caribbean" epic and (*inset*) Errol Flynn as a silver-screen buccaneer in 1935.

"PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN" COURTESY OF BUENA VISTA PICTURES; (INSET): ERROL FLYNN IN "CAPTAIN BLOOD" © JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS

Irish Allure

Producer Jerry Bruckheimer's sprawling "King Arthur" has been shooting in Ireland, an island country that offers filmmakers easy accessibility, talented crews, state-of-the-art production facilities, and financial incentives. The cooperation of local authorities is assured, and Ireland is rich in the diverse topography that appeals to both filmmakers and tourists. "Filmmaking in Ireland is easy and our industry is booming," says Irish Film Board Commissioner Naoise Barry, adding that the country hosts between fifteen and twenty features in an average year.

Ever since native son John Boorman's "Excalibur" demonstrated what the Irish countryside could bring to the big screen, Ireland's popularity has soared among international movie producers. Mel Gibson's "Braveheart," a story of Scottish independence, shot in part in lyrically scenic County Wicklow, and Steven Spielberg's D-day epic, "Saving Private Ryan," which used the Wexford coastline for its Omaha Beach, are both high-profile films shot near Dublin. The country's wealth of diversified locations helped lure A&E TV movie "Benedict Arnold," starring Kelsey Grammer and Aidan Quinn, Joel Schumacher's "Veronica Guerin" with Cate Blanchett, and "Intermission" with Colin Farrell to Ireland last year. With its battle scenes staged around a replica of Hadrian's wall in rural Ballymore Eustace in County Kildare, Disney's "King Arthur is scheduled for release Christmas, 2004.

In a recent survey conducted by Bord Fáilte, the Irish National Tourism Agency, fourteen per cent of U.S. respondents listed "films/movies" as an important influence in their decisions to visit Ireland. "Film-induced tourism has had a major impact on many parts of Ireland," says Barry.

Hawaiian Superstar

Filmmakers love Kauai because the lightly populated island presents a compact package of dramatic scenery and varied climate zones. The geographical diversity is startling and ranges from arid seashores to a lofty, mountainous rain forest that is said to be "the rainiest place on earth." The island has masqueraded as a number of other places, reports Sue Kanoho, the executive director of Kauai's visitors bureau. She advises, "You need to watch the scrolling credits at the end of the films to see that the incredible scenery you thought was the Philippines, or Africa, or Costa Rica, or Thailand was actually Kauai."

The Waimea Canyon (often called the Grand Canyon of the Pacific) and the steep ocean cliffs of the Na Pali Coast offer striking locales for film producers. There's also the sweeping Hanalei Valley, and the island's secluded beaches, tight little harbors, and quiet country towns. "South Pacific" made Kauai a star when Mitzi Gaynor washed that man right out of her hair at Lumahai Beach, just past the hamlet of Hanalei. Later, the village became an Australian bush town in "The Thorn Birds." King Kong fell for Jessica Lange on the jungled Na Pali coast in the Dino de Laurentis remake, and Indiana Jones struggled against South American headhunters in the Honopu Valley and fled along the Huleia River in "Raiders of the Lost Ark." But Kauai really hit its stride in the nineteen-nineties

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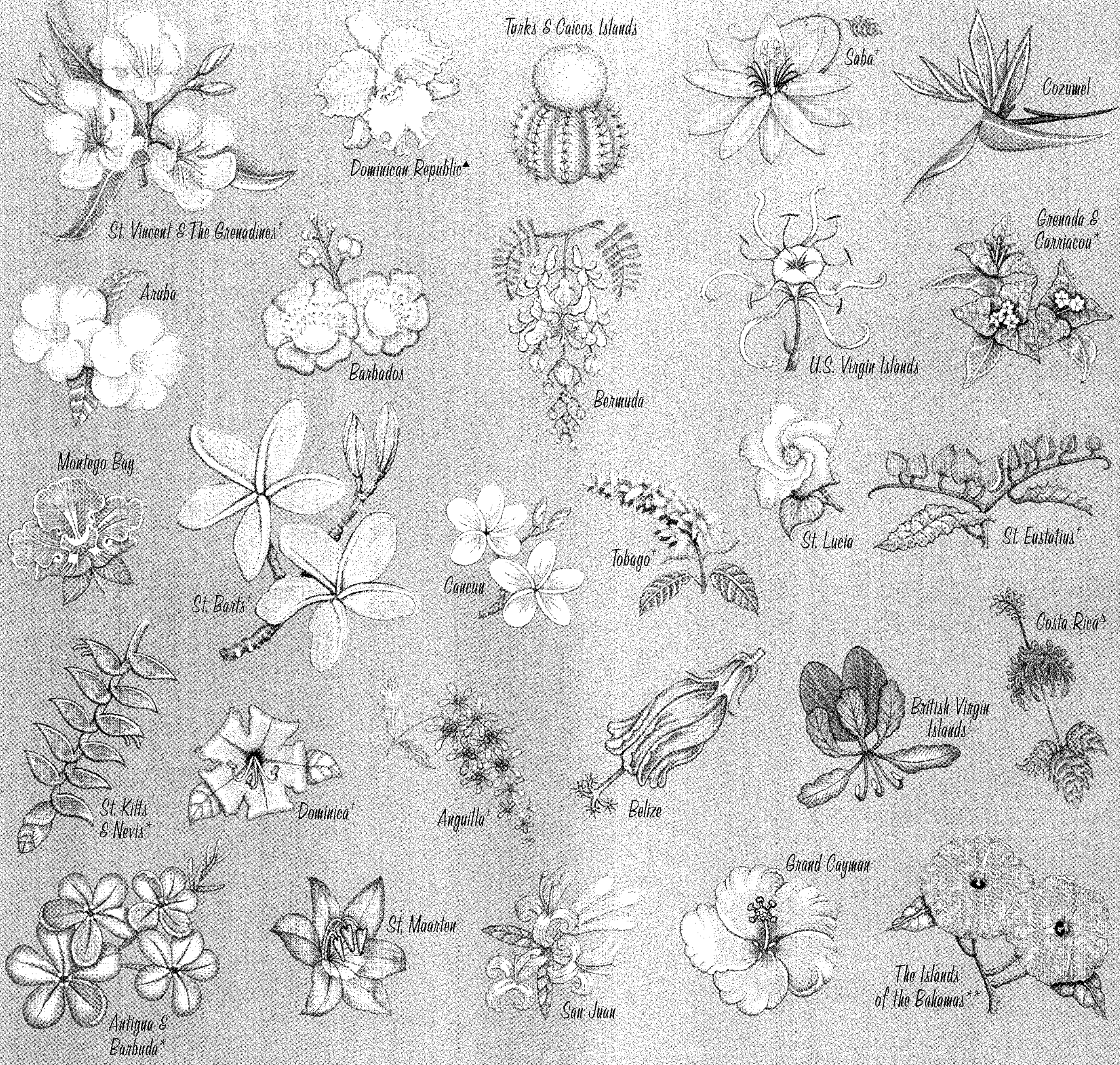
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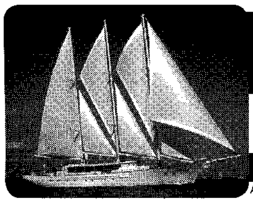

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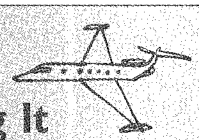
when Steven Spielberg's "Jurassic Park" arrived (soon followed by Jurassic II and III). Filming took place all over the island, but the dinosaur park's entrance gates were built in The Wailua Forest at the base of Mt. Waialeale.

The same two qualities that attract filmmakers—scenic beauty and a laid-back lifestyle—also attract visitors. Following the release of "Six Days, Seven Nights" the Kauai visitors bureau was swamped by calls. "People wanted to know where the resort in the movie was located, so they could stay there," says Kanoho. But alas, the hotel was only a movie set that was struck right after the shoot ended. While the filming was in progress, local surfers were paid twenty dollars an hour not to spoil shots by surfing. Nowadays, film locations for several movies can be visited on a tour operated by Hawaii Movie Tours (800-628-8432; www.hawaiimovietour.com).



Winging It

The Caribbean is a favored destination for filmmakers for the same reasons Americans choose to vacation in the region. Weather, scenery, beaches, luxe hotels, diverse cultures, and varied architecture are all among the reasons. But easy fly-in accessibility may top the list of desirable island attributes. Most of the Caribbean destinations used by filmmakers are serviced by US Airways, and almost all of them are within a few hours of major U.S. hubs. Grand Cayman is just three hours from most American gateways, and just five hours from the West Coast. Other easy-to-reach, film-friendly islands on US Airways' schedule are Jamaica, the Bahamas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Antigua, and Puerto Rico.

For more information about US Airways' connections to the region, Call **800-428-4322** or visit **www. usairways.com**.

Feeling "All Right"

If Kauai is the superstar of Pacific island filming, Jamaica is its Caribbean counterpart. In fact, Jamaica fitted "How Stella Got Her Groove Back" so well that it's hard to imagine it having been shot elsewhere. Third largest among the Caribbean islands, Jamaica possesses the sass and savvy to play the perfect host to international film companies—from its Port Antonio and Drax Hall impersonating African plantations in "Instinct" to the six hundred-foot Dunn's River Falls in "Dr. No."

Jamaica's extraordinary scenery and great biodiversity exerts an irresistible pull. A mountainous interior topped by Blue Mountain Peak (7,402 feet) offers photogenic rushing rivers and equally splendid java, for which the region is justly famous. Arid savannas prove the island is more than just plush beach resorts, and if it's a rain forest you require, that's here too. Fimmakers for the sixties British version of "Lord of the Flies" couldn't resist the tranquillity of Frenchman's Cove, with its volcanic rock formations and overhanging trees spilling down to the water's edge.

Action Underwater

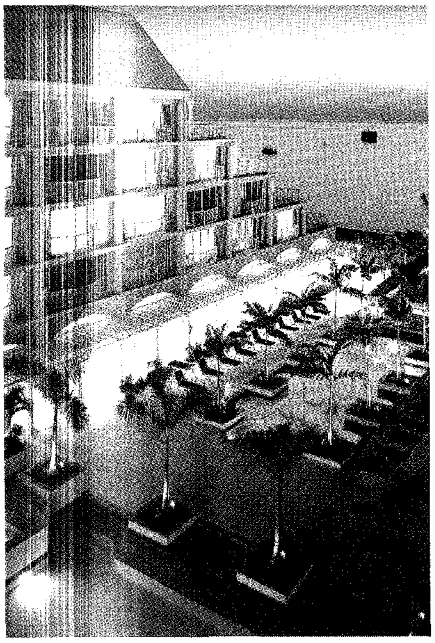
The pièce de résistance of The Cayman Islands (as far as cinematographers are concerned) is its pristine offshore zones. The three-island nation enjoys exceptionally clear coastal waters due to a lack of any runoff. Steep ocean drop-offs close to shore mean that little time is lost transporting equipment to deep-water locations. Water clarity—often to a depth of two hundred feet—is why the Caymans rank among the world's top five diving and snorkeling destinations, says deputy tourism director Pilar Bush.

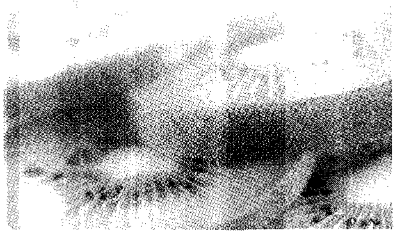
Many received their first introduction to the Caymans a decade ago with the release of "The Firm" (Gene Hackman and Tom Cruise), the big-budget feature shot both underwater and at overland sites around Grand Cayman. The full cinematic potential of the islands remains relatively untapped, however, and the limestone bluffs of Cayman Brac, the Mastic Trail, which winds through a two-million-year-old woodland, and coastlines that appear to be as untouched as when Columbus sailed past them five centuries ago present intriguing location prospects for movie moguls.

Coming Attractions

Woody Allen's as-yet-untitled next movie, starring Will Ferrell, Chloë Sevigny, and Amanda Peet has begun production on the island of Manhattan. And New York City is well equipped to host a filmmaker so justly celebrated for his unparalleled urban wit. It bears remembering that Queens, NY, played a significant part in the history of the American film industry with Paramount opening its studios in Astoria in 1920 before it was bundled off to Hollywood for more studio space, better weather for filming, and lousier bagels. Now known as Kaufman-Astoria Studios, it is the location of the American Museum of the Moving Image as well as the studio complex recently used for the

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS © ROBERT ROTH





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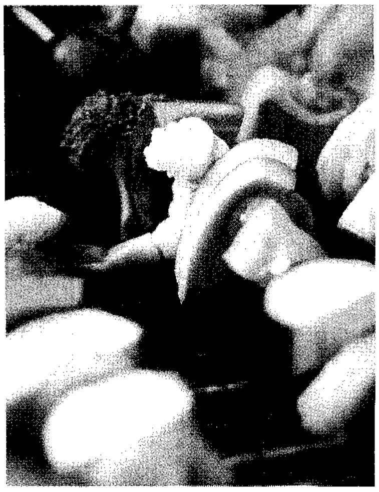

February 5 – 8, 2004 The Cayman Islands invites you to join world renowned chefs Randy Lewis and E. Michael Reidt, along with wine experts Anthony Giglio and Joshua Wesson, at the beautiful Hyatt Regency Grand Cayman Resort and Villas for "The Cayman Classic," a three-day epicurean escape. Call your travel professional or Continental Airlines Vacations at 1.800.829.7777 to book your trip.

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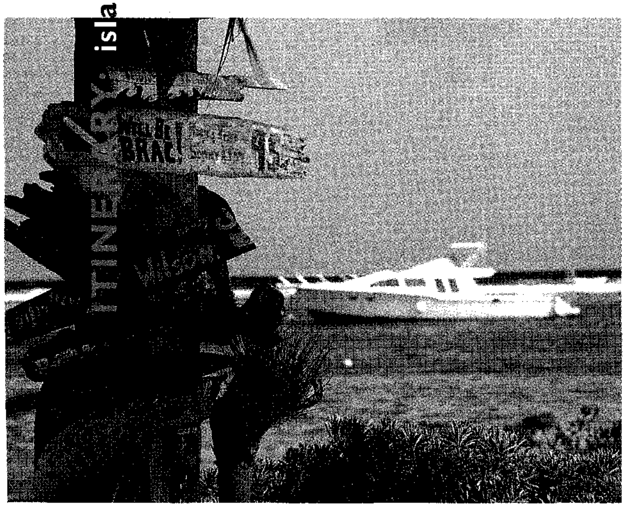

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Frank Oz-directed remake of "Stepford Wives," starring Nicole Kidman and Matthew Broderick and HBO miniseries, "Angels of America."

Among the made-in-Manhattan features ready for distribution is "In the Cut" (scheduled for release in NY and LA on October 22nd), which has an out-of-character Meg Ryan embroiled in a brutal murder. Wrapping earlier this year were "Birth" (Kidman, Lauren Bacall, and Anne Heche); "2B Perfectly Honest" (John Turturro); "Door in the Floor" (Jeff Bridges and Kim Basinger); and "Raising Helen" (Kate Hudson, Joan Cusack, and Helen Mirren). Underway are "Kinsey," the story of the controversial father of the sex revolution (Liam Neeson and Laura Linney) and "Taxi" (Queen Latifah).

Cinematographers' deviousness continues to delight and astonish us. Iceland's frozen lagoon, the Jokulsarlon, was perhaps the only place on earth where the car chase scenes in "Die Another Day" could have been filmed. Dubbed an "ice ballet" by director Lee Tamahori, the film's production designer and "Titanic" Oscar-winner, Peter Lamont observed, "It was unique." Referring to the lagoon's ice, he remarked, "I've never seen blues like those anywhere."

Ever adding to the mystique of the movies, islands and island nations around the world will continue to inspire the storyboards of cinema savants. And moviegoers, once introduced to these exotic locales, will seek them out, determined to get to know them better. q

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2. All contestants must be 18 years of age or older and a legal resident of one of the fifty United States or District of Columbia as of the date of entry.
3. Contestants may submit one (1) entry per household. All entries must be received by 11:59 PM ET, February 9, 2004. All submitted entries become the property of The Condé Nast Publications (Sponsor) and will not be acknowledged or returned.
4. Contestants may enter the sweepstakes by completing and submitting the prepaid Great Getaways Sweepstakes business reply card in the "Itinerary: Islands" section of the October 20, 2003 issue of *The New Yorker*, or by visiting the Special Sections page of NewYorkerReaderLink.com and completing the online response entry form. Entries that are lost, late, misdirected, garbled, or incompletely received, for any reason, including by reason of hardware, software, browser or network failure, malfunction, congestion, or incompatibility at Sponsor's Web site or elsewhere, will not be eligible. Sponsor, in its sole discretion, reserves the right to disqualify any person tampering with the entry processor, the operation of the Web site or otherwise in violation of the rules. It further reserves the right to cancel, terminate or modify any promotion not capable of completion as planned, including infection by computer virus, bugs tampering, unauthorized intervention, force majeure or technical failures of any sort.
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10. For name of winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the "Itinerary: Islands" Great Getaways Sweepstakes Winner, *The New Yorker* Merchandising Department, 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036 after February 11, 2003.

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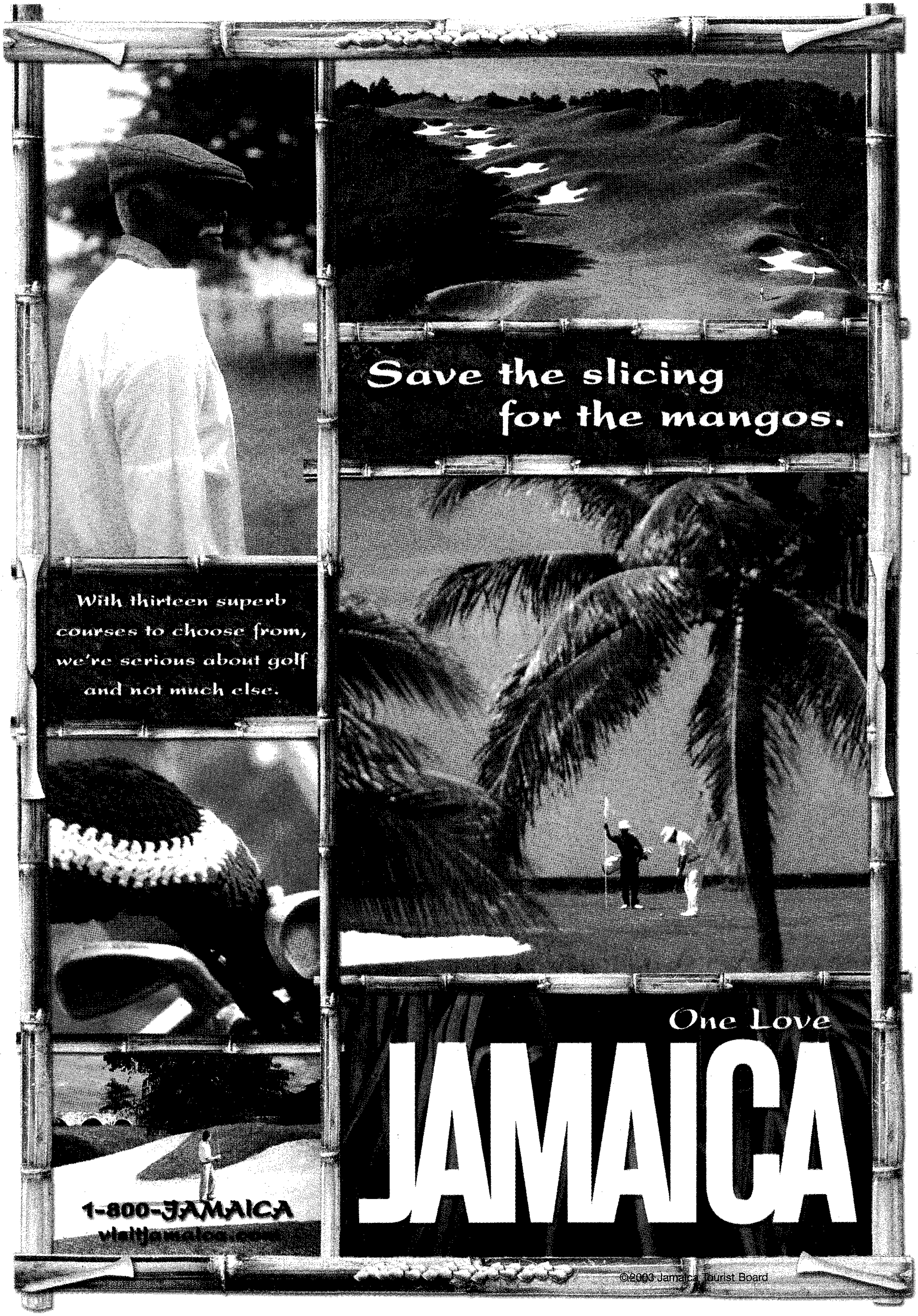
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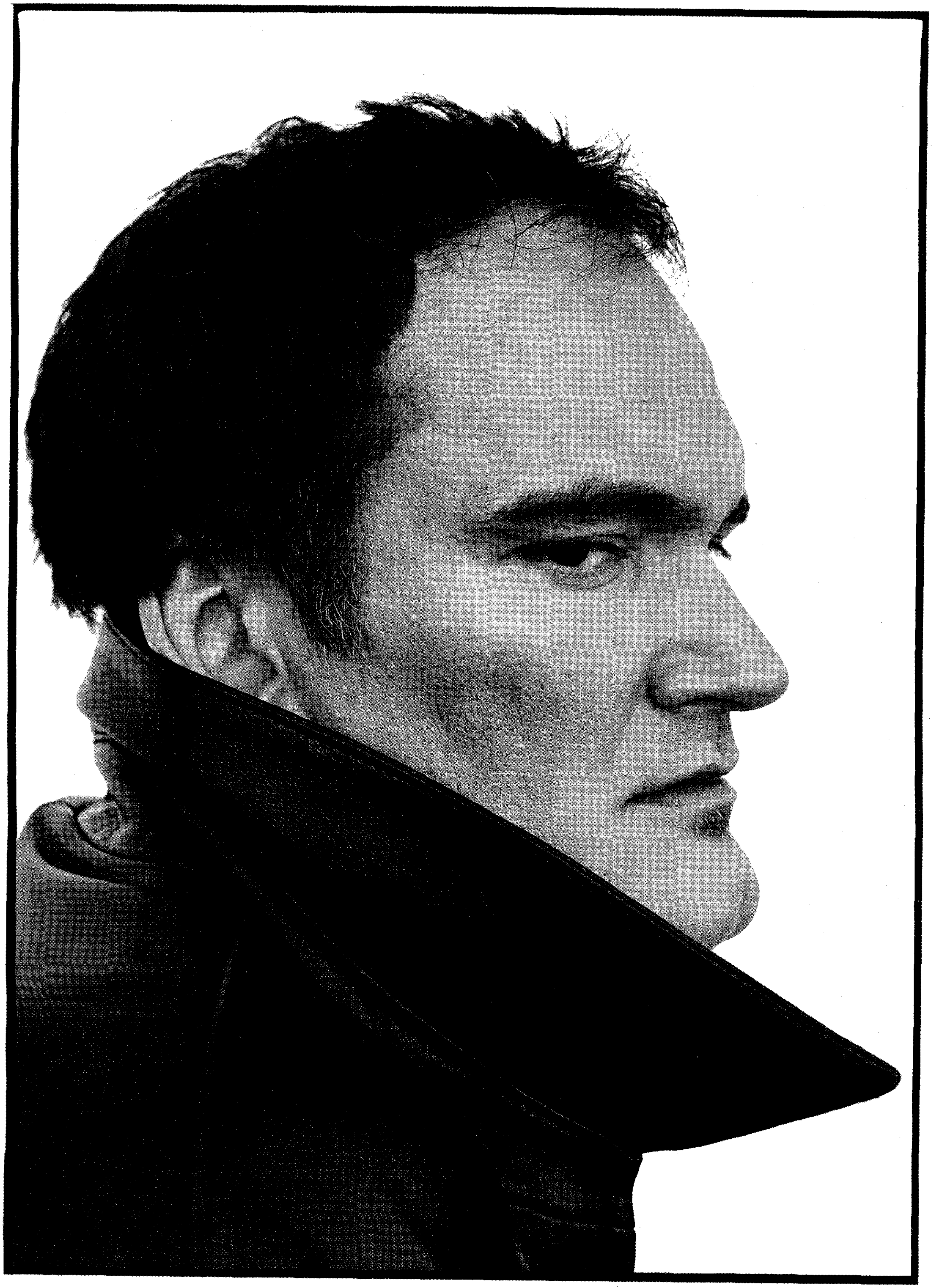


"The audience and the director, it's an S & M relationship, and the audience is the M." Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

PROFILES

THE MOVIE LOVER

In Quentin Tarantino's mind, the projector never stops running.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

When Quentin Tarantino goes to the movies, he sits in the front. Not in the first row, where he'd have to move his head from side to side to see what's happening in the corners, but the third or fourth row, where he can take in the whole screen and is aware of nothing but the screen. The trick is to exclude from his range of vision anything that would take him out of the movie, such as exit signs or wall sconces or just distance. He wants to be overwhelmed. Otherwise, what's the point? He might as well be watching television. Because he sits so far forward, his head is tipped back and his whole face is opened to the screen, as though he were receiving Communion—mouth slightly open, eyes wide, fist-in-a-sock chin pushing forward, large, pale forehead flickering with the film.

When Tarantino comes home at night after a late double feature, he sometimes goes by himself to the theatre that he's built in his house and watches a third movie. Then, at two or three in the morning, when he's really exhausted and about to fall asleep, he'll watch a fourth movie. There's a red plush sofa at the front of the theatre where he sits when he's alone, and about fifty red seats behind in gradated rows, for guests. The room is designed to look like an old-fashioned cinema, with wall-to-wall carpeting of a diamond-shaped design and velvet ropes supported by short brass poles. It is lit by a row of brass carriage lamps hanging by chains from the ceiling, and on the walls Tarantino has hung a series of photographs of a ruined movie theatre in Texas. On a table next to the sofa stand five or six piles of DVDs that he has recently watched or intends to watch soon: "The House with Laughing Windows," "Short Night of the Glass Dolls," "Fangs of the Living Dead," "Flavia the Heretic," "Beast of Blood," "Legendary Weapons of China," "Dirty Deeds," "Seven Blood-stained Orchids," "Mad Doctor of Blood Island," "Candy Stripe Nurses," "Private-Duty Nurses," "Women in Cages," "Spasmo." It's difficult to imagine what it must be like to inhabit Tarantino's mind, crammed as it is with thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of filmed images—eyes narrowing, hands fumbling, guns firing, bodies falling, car chases, chases on foot, empty streets, façades of houses, trees blowing, open doorways, taps running, unmade beds, storms through windows, and everything else you could possibly imagine seeing in a movie. One of the reasons that Tarantino is as good a filmmaker as he is is that he is an audience member first and a director second.

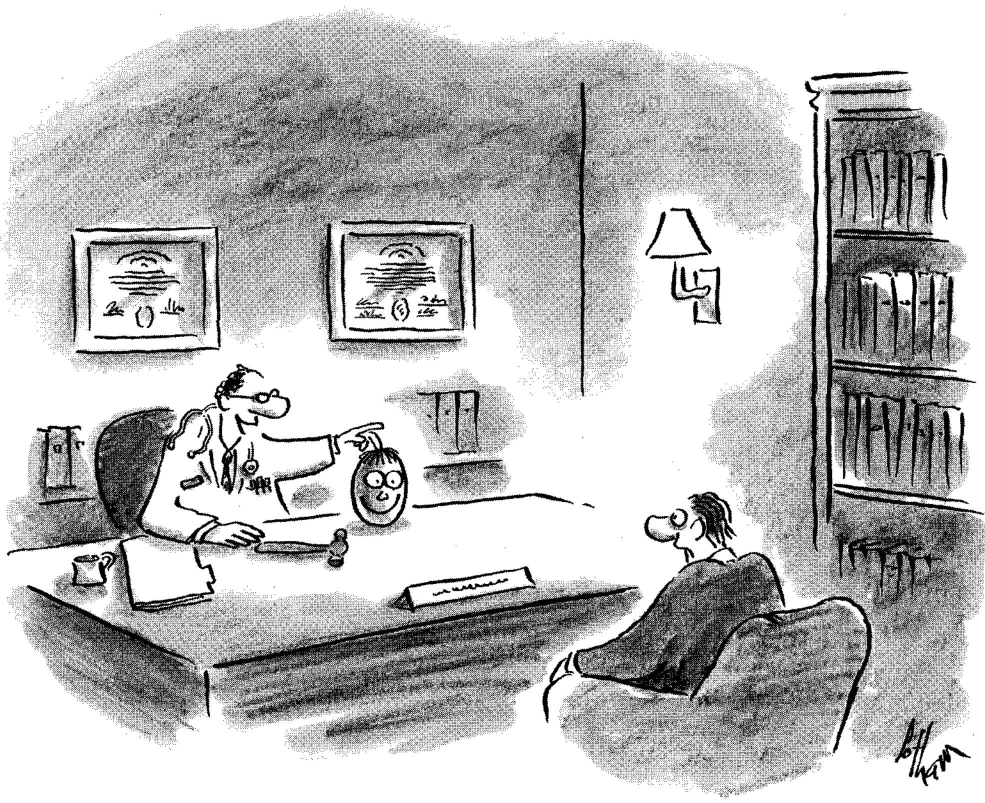
Before Tarantino began making movies, one of his heroes was Jean-Luc Godard. He loved Godard's unusual shots—the long takes, the long, long closeups. Even though he has now outgrown Godard, he named his production company A Band Apart, after Godard's film "Bande à Part" ("Band of Outsiders"), and before he filmed the John Travolta–Uma Thurman twist contest in "Pulp Fiction" he showed the eccentric, peculiarly enthralling dance sequence in "Bande à Part" to Thurman, so she could see what he had in mind. Other influences are even easier to spot: Godard would take a hoary American genre like a gangster movie and make it lighter, more playful, more self-consciously a movie, and he would interrupt the action with endless conversations.

Nonetheless, one fact that says a lot about Tarantino is that he prefers Jim McBride's 1983 remake of "Breathless" to the Godard original. The McBride version, in color, differs from the black-and-white Godard in exactly the ways you'd expect if you subscribed to all the oldest clichés about Hollywood and France: there's less conversation, more running. Godard's hero, played by the sublime Jean-Paul Belmondo, is affectless and cool, despite his love for the heroine, played by Jean Seberg. He's a cool dresser, he steals cars for the hell of it, and he's a cool killer, as amoral as a houseplant, killing existentially, for no good reason. Seberg is cool, too: she likes Belmondo more than she lets on, but she can live without him, and when she discovers he's a criminal she handles it like a pro, bluffing her way out of an interview with the police. When McBride's heroine, on the other hand, finds out that her boyfriend is being sought for murder by the police, she weeps. McBride's hero, played by Richard Gere, is somewhat cool, but not very. He's a sweet, clownish romantic who wears absurd, peacocky American clothes (a frilly red tuxedo shirt, plaid pants), and for whom driving fast is a crazy thrill. When he kills a cop, it's completely by accident, and afterward he's upset and scared. Tarantino says that he loved the McBride version because it was the kind of movie he could imagine making himself; and, indeed, the Richard Gere character is, in his sweetness and his clownish romanticism and his accidental crime, not unlike Clarence, the hero of Tarantino's script "True Romance." Godard was, in the end, too breezy, too detached, too motiveless, too delicate, too *French* to serve as a model. Godard said that when he saw a print of "Breathless" for the first time he realized that he'd made something completely different from what he intended: he'd thought he was making a gangster movie like "Scarface," but he discovered that he had in fact made "Alice in Wonderland." This is the difference between him and Tarantino, one of the differences that thirty-five years has wrought: Tarantino *knows* he's making "Alice in Wonderland."

"Breathless" is not the only remake that Tarantino likes better than the original. He likes L. M. (Kit) Carson and McBride's screenplay version of "The Moviegoer" better than Walker Percy's novel, which he found unemotional and dry. And he much prefers Adrian Lyne's 1997 "Lolita" to Stanley Kubrick's version, made in 1962. "I think Adrian Lyne's 'Lolita' is a masterpiece," he says. "When I saw it, I thought, Boy, I don't know if Kubrick even read the novel. Kubrick manages to take that book and make this madcap comedy out of it that's actually pretty terrific. But the idea that you can do a movie about Lolita and not have one single, solitary disturbing image in it at all is crazy. It's fraudulent! I mean, to me he's missing the most fascinating part of the work, which is looking through a pedophile's eyes and actually going along with it."

Tarantino is not, in general, a great fan of Kubrick—he finds Kubrick's films too cold, too composed. He appreciates the films; he just doesn't feel any affection for them. Still, he will say that the first twenty minutes of "A Clockwork Orange" are as good as moviemaking gets. "That first twenty minutes is pretty fucking perfect," he says. "The whole non-stop parade of Alex and the druids or whatever they were called: they beat up a bum, they have a gang fight, they go to the milk bar, they rape a girl, they break into the house, and they're driving and playing the Beethoven, and Malcolm McDowell's fantastic narration is going on, and it's about as poppy and visceral and perfect a piece of cinematic moviemaking as I think had ever been done up until that time. It's like that long opening sentence of Jack Kerouac's 'The Subterraneans,' all right, that great run-on sentence that goes on for almost a page and a half. I always thought Kubrick was a hypocrite, because his party line was, I'm not making a movie about violence, I'm making a movie against violence. And it's just, like, Get the fuck off. I know and you know your dick was hard the entire time you were shooting those first twenty minutes, you couldn't keep it in your pants the entire time you were editing it and scoring it. You liked the rest of the movie, but you put up with the rest of the movie. You did it for those first twenty minutes. And if you don't say you did you're a fucking liar."

Near the end of the second part of Tarantino's new movie, "Kill Bill," the heroine, who is known as the Bride and is played by Uma Thurman, tracks down her ex-boss Bill's old mentor and confronts him in a Mexican whorehouse. ("Kill Bill" was originally conceived as one movie but is being released in two halves: Vol. 1 and Vol. 2.) Tarantino had decided that the scene should be shot in an authentic Mexican whorehouse, so various scouts and production assistants flew to Mexico last winter and found, near an obscure beach resort ninety miles south of Puerto Vallarta, the place they were looking for. When the scouts found it, the whorehouse was more authentic than was really necessary—it lacked a bathroom and stood across the road from a pig slaughterhouse, so the floor was covered with feces of both human and porcine origin—but the scouts got it cleaned up and sent pictures of it to the production designers in Los Angeles. It was an extremely basic whorehouse—just a thatched roof over wood poles, with a dirt floor and a couple of hammocks—so the production designers installed a small bar at one end and a caged jukebox at the other and added some tin-can lampshades, a Foosball table, a few white plastic chairs, and a green parrot in a cage. Tarantino liked the idea of the slaughterhouse nearby, so the designers rented more pigs and some chickens. Shortly before the crew arrived to start shooting, there was a murder at the whorehouse and the police shut it down, which was a problem because Tarantino wanted to use the actual whores and their pimp in the scene. But, as it turned out, the establishment had simply moved a little way down the street, and the scouts found it again with no trouble.



"This coconut represents your head."

The whorehouse scene was one of the last in the movie to be shot. It was February 12th:

“One posse, please.”

• •

Day 150 in “Kill Bill” production time. Tarantino had shot the movie’s fight scenes the previous summer, in China and Japan, and in the fall he had shot indoors in L.A. In Mexico, the crew was staying at a breezy beach hotel called Costa Careyes, but the whorehouse was some distance inland, so it was very hot. It smelled faintly but pleasantly of dung. The rented pigs grunted in their pen across the street. The whores were short and chubby and wore tube tops and little skirts. One had been instructed to carry laundry from stage left to right; another lay in a hammock; two more pretended to play cards at a table. Uma Thurman, wearing a black leather jacket, sunglasses, jeans, and a dagger in a sheath attached to her leg, stood waiting in the doorway. Michael Parks, who was playing the mentor, sat in a wheelchair at the far end, aged by makeup and a white goatee, smoking Red Apple cigarettes (a little joke of Tarantino’s—he included the same fake product in “Pulp Fiction”). The parrot wolf-whistled softly in its cage.

Tarantino bounded around the set like a St. Bernard recently reunited with its owner, hugging people, ruffling their hair, laughing loudly, joking. In the confines of the whorehouse, he seemed larger and more ungainly than usual, as though he were not fully housebroken and had to be prevented from slipping on things and knocking over the equipment. He was wearing a baggy black T-shirt that read “Property of Too Black Guys Marketing Dept.,” and baggy black cargo pants. His face was red and moist from the heat, and in the course of shooting his hair had grown into a kind of Renaissance bowl shape, like Gérard Depardieu’s in “The Return of Martin Guerre.” Someone handed out Magnum ice-cream bars, and Tarantino started singing the Magnum advertising jingle. He seemed to be in a very good mood. He ran over to the whore in the hammock and adjusted the angle of her feet. He ran back to look at her through the camera. Suddenly the jukebox let forth a blast of loud music and everybody jumped. “Ooh, I hope I can still have children,” Tarantino said. When everything was ready, he settled into position, crouched on an upturned crate a foot or two from Parks, and stared at him. (While other directors direct from a bank of video monitors, some distance away from the action, it is a point of honor with Tarantino that he always sits as close to the actors as possible and watches directly so they can feel the force of his attention.)

“Michael, your cigarette’s kinda crooked,” he told Parks. The cigarette had slipped a hair sideways in its holder. Parks adjusted it. “Better. Michael, just so you know, your frame is very severe—you can’t really move past my hand,” he said, putting his hand an inch or two from Parks’s face. Parks nodded. “*Silencio!*” Tarantino bellowed. “*Silenci*-fucking-*o!*”

“I remember when he was only five,” Parks said, in character, reminiscing about the eponymous Bill. “I took him to the movies. It was a movie starring Lana Turner. And whenever she would appear onscreen, he would begin sucking his thumb to an obscene amount. And I knew right then, this boy would be a fool for blondes.”

Michael Parks is one of Tarantino’s favorite actors. He has wanted to cast him for some time, and now that he’s found a movie that’s right he has cast him twice, in two different roles. Years ago, when Tarantino was at a Sundance workshop, doing the final edits on his “Reservoir Dogs” script, he met Sydney Pollack and told him how much he admired an “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” episode that Pollack had directed which starred Parks. “Sydney Pollack goes, ‘Michael Parks! He was a damn good actor,’ ” Tarantino says. “ ‘What ever happened to him?’ And I was, like, ‘He didn’t go anywhere! Give him a fucking call! Bring him in for an audition! He just doesn’t have an agent who can get into your office anymore.’ ” Parks is the most recent in a series of actors whose careers Tarantino has resuscitated, of whom John Travolta in “Pulp Fiction” is only the most obvious example. He did the same for Pam Grier and Robert Forster in “Jackie Brown.” Both Grier and Forster were heroes of Tarantino’s childhood—Forster played the lead in a one-season early-seventies TV show, “Banyon,” that Tarantino loved; Grier was the star of blaxploitation movies such as “Foxy Brown,” “Coffy,” and “Scream, Blacula, Scream”—and both had seen their careers founder in the late seventies and had taken to playing small parts in bad movies and the low end of TV. “If you did know who Robert Forster is, there’s a sweet quality about seeing him have another day in court, seeing what a good actor he is,” Tarantino says. “It maybe makes you think, God, what a fucked-up business, how does a guy like that get thrown on the scrap heap? How many more of them are there out there? Well, there’s a lot.”

But Tarantino didn’t cast Forster and Grier for charity. (His brilliance at casting is one of the few things about him that people tend to agree on.) To him, the fact that they had been down and out added to their value. In “Jackie Brown,” part of what he had to do was convey cinematically all the backstory and the characterization that Elmore Leonard had had three hundred and fifty pages to get to in "Rum Punch," the novel from which the film was adapted, and for that he felt he needed actors who had been around. "Robert Forster's face is backstory," Tarantino says. "That was so with both him and Pam Grier. If you've been an actor in this business for as long as they have, you've seen and fucking done it all, all right? They've had heartbreaks and success and failure and money and no money, and it's right there. They don't have to do anything."

When Tarantino says they've done it all, he means, equally, the roles they've played and the life they've lived. These things are not distinct for him: both create a kind of density or thickness in a character that you can't get any other way. He loves actors' baggage of all sorts. He likes to tell a story about the time Elmore Leonard visited the set of "Joe Kidd," a movie he wrote for Clint Eastwood. At one point, Eastwood put his hand on his gun and his enemy didn't draw his own gun because he was afraid. Eastwood objected that the enemy should not be afraid at that stage in the movie—how would he know that Eastwood was a lightning draw? The enemy wouldn't, Leonard conceded, but that didn't matter: the *audience* would know, because they'd seen his other movies. When Tarantino was preparing the set of "Jackie Brown," he visited Robert Forster's house and talked to him about his life (he likes to do this with actors), and he discovered that Forster's father had been an elephant trainer for Ringling Brothers Circus. He collected a few family photographs and elephant-training tools from Forster and placed them in a glass cabinet in Max Cherry's office; he thought of them thenceforth as the photographs and tools of Max Cherry's father. Nobody who saw the movie would know why they were there, but he would know and Forster would know, and he felt that would make a difference.

Many critics have asserted that Tarantino's characters are hollow, cartoonish figures (Forster's and Grier's characters are exceptions), functioning only as hooks on which various clever jokes can be hung. But while it is certainly true that most Tarantino characters are cartoonish, to conclude that they must therefore be hollow is to assume that substance or depth in a movie character has the same meaning—is made of the same stuff—as substance or depth in a person. Tarantino's characters do not all have psychological substance; some (such as the Bruce Willis character in "Pulp Fiction") are made, instead, out of history—out of predecessor characters whose clichés they inhabit and twist, in a movie character's version of an Oedipal dynamic. This is as it should be: weighing down genre characters with real psychologies is risky. The otherwise lightfooted "Kill Bill" begins to lumber whenever Thurman's killing-machine Bride turns maternal. When a Tarantino character launches into a riff about Madonna or Elvis, he may seem to be exhibiting a particular psychology, escaping the confines of his genre, but in fact those monologues sound very much alike. What's being exhibited is not the personality of the character but the personality of the movie.

Moreover, Tarantino *loves* his characters. Several years ago, he commissioned an artist in Texas to make sculptures of some of them—Mia Wallace, from "Pulp Fiction," Louis and Melanie and Max Cherry, from "Jackie Brown," Mr. Blonde, from "Reservoir Dogs." When he draws up a contract with Miramax, he has his lawyer include an unusual provision that secures him all the rights to the characters in the future, so that nobody can use them—for sequels or spinoffs or marketing or anything else—without his permission, and so that he can use them again himself in a movie whenever he likes. He intends gradually to build a whole Tarantino world, so that his movies intersect with one another. He has already started doing this: Mr. White, of "Reservoir Dogs," used to do jobs with Alabama, the heroine of "True Romance"; Vic Vega, of "Reservoir Dogs," is related to Vincent Vega, of "Pulp Fiction."

One of the many personal genres that Tarantino has made up is "hangout movies"—movies whose plot and camerawork you may admire but whose primary attraction is the characters. A hangout movie is one that you watch over and over again, just to spend time with them. "Rio Bravo," one of Tarantino's three favorite movies of all time (the two others are "Taxi Driver" and "Blow Out"), is a hangout movie. Richard Linklater's "Dazed and Confused," perhaps Tarantino's favorite movie of the nineties, is another hangout movie, and when Tarantino is abroad, in a hotel or some apartment he's rented, if he feels lonely he goes to a video store and rents "Dazed and Confused," and then he doesn't feel lonely anymore. The characters in the movie have become friends of his.

"Reservoir Dogs" and "Pulp Fiction" aren't hangout movies, but Tarantino hopes that "Jackie Brown" has become one. He hopes that people will see it the first time just to get the plot out of the way, and then, whenever they feel in need of a certain sort of company, watch it again. "Jackie Brown," he thinks, is the sort of movie that people tend to like better the second time, even better the third time, and maybe even better the fourth time. "You don't watch it four times in a row," he says. "It's just that, for people who like it, I really wanted to give them a gift that they could watch for the rest of their lives. Every two or three years, put in 'Jackie Brown' again, and you're drinking white wine with Jackie, and drinking Screwdrivers with Ordell, and taking bong hits with Melanie and Louis."

The impact of "Pulp Fiction" was such that three book-length biographies of Tarantino were published before he was thirty-three, and a fourth appeared a few years later. The books went some way toward correcting the Agee-esque legend that had grown up around Tarantino since the release of "Reservoir Dogs": that he was a dirt-poor illiterate hillbilly from Tennessee, brought up by a teen-age dropout. "Quentin would have you believe he was raised by wolves," his mother, Connie Zastoupil, told Jami Bernard, the film critic of the New York *Daily News*. It's true that she was born in Tennessee and had Quentin when she was sixteen, but he was an accident. She got married in order to become an emancipated minor and go to college; she was, therefore, furious to discover that she was pregnant after her husband, Tony

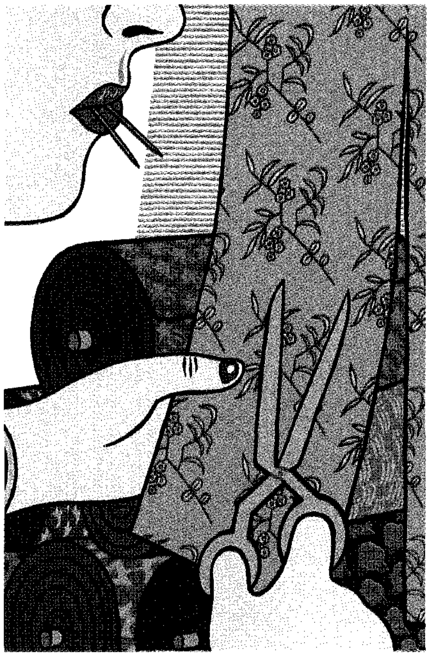
RAGS TO RICHES

Though Ann Roth doesn't like to toot her own horn, or pat herself on the back, or really talk about what she does at all, she will say this: she totally gets the aesthetic of the working girl, and when she dressed Melanie Griffith for the movie that was a paean to said girl she could envision Griffith's character—the hair, the shoulder pads, the unforgettable running shoes—right down to which drawer she kept her nude hose in.

This fall, Roth is presiding over a vast hangar at the Philadelphia Naval Yard, where she is designing the costumes for a new M. Night Shyamalan movie about an isolated utopian community in the nineteenth century. The hangar is full of sewing machines, seamstresses, tables heaped with straw bonnets, and shelves of tall top hats and well-oiled men's lace-up boots. In an adjacent room, a "distresser" picks apart woollen pants with safety pins, and then scrubs them with coarse stones and sandpaper.

She and her crew chose patterns—leaves, flowers, starbursts, sprays of wheat—from early American wallpaper books and had them printed unevenly on crude linen. "I wanted it rough," she said. "A lot of handwork, patches on the knee, darning." For the greatest verisimilitude, she will use buttons made only from wood, bone, antler, vegetable ivory, or nut, and fabrics made out of wool or linen (the community has sheep and flax), but not cotton, silk, or anything synthetic. This rules out the Amish as suppliers, because, as one of Roth's crew put it, "the Amish are not afraid of polyester."

Roth is seventy-one, has an even tan, and wears a beaded ankle bracelet. She grew up in Hanover, Pennsylvania, among the Pennsylvania Dutch, and now lives in Northampton County. "I am very curious, and I remember everything: what people eat, what they wear, what they sing, what they look like," she said. Roth designed the costumes for "Nine to Five" (and sang backup on the title song), and has worked with Mike Nichols on every film he's done since "Silkwood." She won an Oscar in 1997 for "The English Patient," and has been nominated several other times, for her work on "Places in the Heart," "The Talented Mr. Ripley," and "The Hours." (The nose was her idea.) Her professional idol is Piero Tosi, who did the costumes for Luchino Visconti's "The Leopard" and many other iconic Italian movies.


MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Some of the most important people in her costume world—"a world that is very, very dear to me"—are Mr. Box, in Bristol, England, who makes moleskin and a heavy cavalry tweed; Pat Kline, of Red Lion, Pennsylvania, who weaves and dyes wool; twin sister seamstresses and the Pompeii cobblers in Rome; a fellow in Southbury, Connecticut, who has Civil War hats and jackets with actual bullet holes; and an Indian tailor in Chelsea who makes shirts super-fast.

Roth's next finished movie is "Cold Mountain," a Civil War romance, which comes out in December. The movie's director, Anthony Minghella, describes her as "less of a costume designer, more of a filmmaker. Her obsession is for performance, for the ways in which what actors wear helps them create character—inhibiting movement, facilitating it, choreographing the performance with fabric, undergarments, shoes." With the help of her daughter, Hannah, Roth researched the Civil War intensively. Together, they had to account for "every single regiment and every single uniform and every stripe—the size, the color, the placement, and who the generals were," she said. "There were caps made before 1864 and caps made after 1864, jackets for this regiment and that regiment. We made the buttons, the gloves, the knee socks, and two thousand pairs of shoes. We had all the fabric made—except for the federal officers' trousers, because Woolrich had them, exactly the same."

Between screen tests in Philadelphia, she went over to a rack where some unsatisfying clothes were hanging. "Honeybunch," she said to an assistant, "I have to replace these. Feel it. You're going to have to send those to California." By "California," she meant Pacific Coast Laundry, in Los Angeles, where they stone-wash. She then inspected a beautifully tailored (to look sloppy) coat of Harris tweed and showed off a striped woollen scarf made by "one of the great knitters" to look like the handiwork of someone with two left hands. Another member of her crew commented on the loveliness of a fabric swatch. "You think so?" Roth said. "It looks like Armani, for God's sake." After a second, she reconsidered. "You know, it would make sexy trousers. Good God, what a whore I am. Hand me that tape measure, sweetheart, baby, darling."

—Dana Goodyear

Tarantino, had assured her that he was sterile. She was angry enough to divorce him, and she didn't introduce him to his son until Quentin was a few years old. She named her child after two fictional characters: Quint Asper, the Burt Reynolds character on the TV show "Gunsmoke," and Quentin in Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury." She finished college, moved to Los Angeles, became an executive in an H.M.O., and raised her son in and around Manhattan Beach, a middle-class suburb just south of the airport.

Tarantino as a child was preoccupied with movies, and he was always writing. He wrote a screenplay called "Captain Peachfuzz and the Anchovy Bandit," and each year for Mother's Day he would write a little story for and about his mother in which she died at the end (he would assure her that he felt bad about the way things turned out). His taste in music then was mostly old school: he loved soul music, oldies, and rockabilly, and was obsessed with Elvis. ("I was really into rockabilly," he says, "because it was the one time when white hillbilly cats were trying to out-peacock the black guys, and I dug that.") He stopped liking school after kindergarten, and he dropped out for good in the middle of ninth grade. He'd been getting into trouble already, staying out late and drinking, and he was arrested once for shoplifting an Elmore Leonard novel from Kmart. When he finally announced that he was dropping out, his mother, angry but resigned, insisted only that he get a job. He went and got his first job in the film industry, as an usher at the Pussycat Lounge, a porn theatre in Torrance.

TO FORGETTING

Queen of the night
whose reign began
before
always before
mother of how
the story goes
song older than singing

you sweep up my footsteps
how did I find my way here
now there is no way back
you blow my words away
without my hearing you

you erase the faces
even of the living
you travel backward
wherever you are going
taking the days with you
all of them
even the ones I imagined
were safe forever

sovereign of terrible freedom
oh you without feature
and without end
whose face I never see
or never remember
how can I love you

except when you appear
for a moment wearing
the veils and the long train
of memory

disguised as memory
the queen of the day

—*W. S. Merwin*

At twenty-one, Tarantino found his way to Video Archives, a video store near his home, where he worked for the next five years. His fellow-clerks were as obsessed with movies as he was, and so competitive with each other that one committed suicide because he was convinced that he would never be as successful as Tarantino seemed bound to become. Tarantino at the time was heavily into Bob Dylan and was a maniacal Brian De Palma fan. In the months prior to a new De Palma release, he would collect clippings about the film and arrange them in a scrapbook. The day the film came out, he would go to the first show, at noon, by himself. Then, having got the plot out of the way, he would see the film again that night (always the midnight show), with a friend. He wanted to be an actor, and he went to dozens of auditions, but nothing came of them except a one-time role as one of several Elvis impersonators on "The Golden Girls." At one point, figuring his face might be the problem, he went to a plastic surgeon to see about getting his jaw shortened, but the surgeon persuaded him that he had a "characteristic look" and should leave it alone.

For a long time, in other words, he wasn't getting anywhere, and he wasn't happy about it. "I definitely had an angry-young-man thing going through most of my twenties," he says, "because I wanted people to take me and my shit seriously, all right, and I was very full of piss and vinegar about it. When I wrote 'True Romance,' I'd give it to somebody to read and I'd say, 'Now look, don't read this like it's a screenplay Quentin wrote. Treat it like it's a novel you bought.' " He likes to say that if he hadn't become a director he might have been a petty criminal. "Not only did I not go to college—I didn't go to high school," he says. "Through almost all of my twenties, I was making minimum wage. If that had been my life and I didn't have something to work toward, then, yeah, I wouldn't have been happy with working in a burger stand. I wasn't going to be a garbageman, or work at the post office. I had mentors, older men that I met at very young ages, older black guys, con men, larceny, pimpish kind of things, friends of my mom and stuff. I was actually kind of excited about going to the county jail the first time I went"—he was arrested for refusing to pay his parking tickets. "I learned some great dialogue. But after the first time the bloom was completely off the rose. The last time I was there for eight days, and it was really hell."

Tarantino wasn't very successful with girls. He was penniless and gross. He didn't shower very often and sometimes slept in his car (a Honda Civic). But he developed various ways of wooing. He would tell a cute customer that there was a problem with her account, and show her that in the store's computer she was listed as "Dreamgirl." He once borrowed a basket and a tablecloth to take a girl on a picnic, though he had to work, so the picnic took place in the parking lot of the video store. He was a romantic: he didn't like porn movies, even when he was sixteen and working at the Pussycat Lounge. Later, he hired a U.C.L.A. graduate student in English named Grace Lovelace to work at the store because he liked her, and they dated for several years. "When I wrote 'True Romance,' I'd never had a girlfriend," he says. "I always wanted a girlfriend but never had one. Alabama"—the heroine of "True Romance"—"wasn't my dream girl, per se, but she was the kind of girl I always hoped I'd meet, a girl who would give me a chance and realize that I was really cool. Also, there was that whole dynamic of a girl who's your pal. That was a very important thing to me back then."

There is still something gawky and virginal about Tarantino. There's almost no sex in his movies. He says that's because he can't deal with becoming yet another sleazy Hollywood director talking a girl into taking her top off, but it seems that, where his movies are concerned, sex just isn't his thing. In "Kill Bill," he even flouts sexy-female-action-star convention: when the Bride arrives to decimate bad guys in the movie's climactic scene, she shows up not in heels and a bustier but wearing sensible sneakers and a loose-fitting tracksuit. (The outfit is an homage to the one worn by the late Bruce Lee in his movie "Game of Death.")

In the mid-nineteen-eighties, Tarantino and a guy he had met in acting class, Craig Hamann, tried, with a combination of favors and bits of money, to make a movie called "My Best Friend's Birthday," but after a series of disasters they gave up. Tarantino wrote the screenplay for "True Romance" in 1987 and sent it out repeatedly during the next four years. Finally, after a series of bitter contract complications, it was bought, and Tony Scott agreed to direct it. In 1989, Tarantino wrote another script, "Natural Born Killers," which was eventually rewritten and directed by Oliver Stone; in response, Tarantino publicly disavowed it and refused to see Stone's movie. In the end, Tarantino grew sick of losing his scripts and wrote "Reservoir Dogs," a movie designed for a tiny budget—mostly the money he'd made from selling "True Romance" and "Natural Born Killers." To keep the budget small, he set the movie in one location, a warehouse, and he made a virtue of that necessity by creating the sort of intense claustrophobia and paranoia that can arise only when characters with reasons to distrust one another are penned up and unable to leave. (He was inspired by the mood of John Carpenter's remake of "The Thing," in which a group of characters trapped in an Arctic outpost are, one by one, taken over by a monstrous alien parasite.) He showed the screenplay to Lawrence Bender, a young producer and former flamenco dancer with just one film—a low-rent horror movie—to his credit, and Bender vowed to drum up some real money, not the sixty thousand that Tarantino had been planning to use. Through a series of tenuous connections, Bender managed to get the script to Harvey Keitel, and, once Keitel was interested, the money followed.

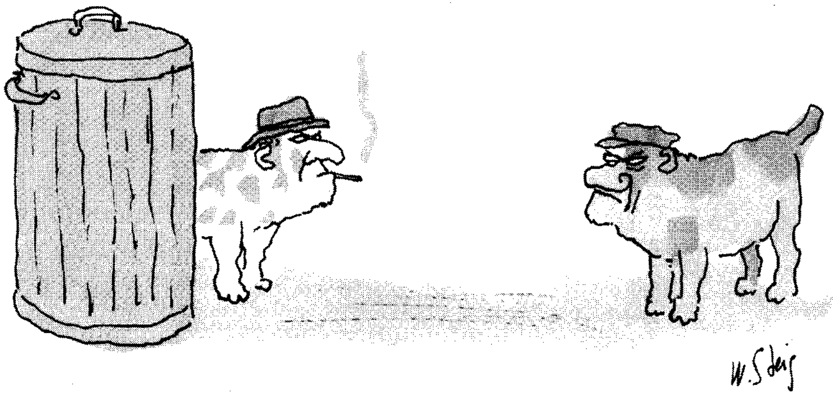
Tarantino spent much of this spring and summer in a small room in a clapboard house in West Hollywood, in the company of his editor, Sally Menke, and her large black Labrador, Zoe. He and Menke sat at a long metal desk and stared at four monitors of differing sizes and went through the footage of "Kill Bill," shot by shot.

I don't know what car wash you worked before you came here that let you stroll in twenty minutes late, but it wasn't owned by me—and I own a fucking car wash.

In each take, the actor said his line slightly differently—slower, faster, with more or less emotion—and had a slightly different expression on his face, and Tarantino had to choose which would make it into the film. In front of Menke on the desk sat a large electronic control panel with dozens of knobs and switches and color-coded keys. Tarantino sat uncharacteristically still. Zoe slept.

I'm not the boss of the customers. I'm the boss of you. And I'm telling you that I want you to keep that shit-kicker hat at home.

One day in the middle of June, Tarantino and Menke went over a scene in which Bill's brother, Budd, is fired from his job as a bouncer



Tough Guys

WILLIAM STEIG, 4/16/84

at the My-Oh-My strip club by the club's owner, Larry. It was a section of the scene that would last maybe a minute in the finished movie. It took hours.

I always work Saturday. Saturday's my day.

No more.

The work was monotonous, but Tarantino was riveted. He sat on the edge of his chair, so that his face was a few inches from the screen. He jiggled his leg. He needed to finish a good version of the movie for a Miramax executive screening the following week. Already something had gone wrong and had had to be redone: in a scene spoken in Japanese, someone had inserted for subtitles the literal English translation rather than Tarantino's rewriting of it.

Saturday's my day. No more. Saturday. No . . . Saturday.

Larry, the club owner, sat in a small seedy office with absurd red wallpaper, snorting coke with one of his strippers; Budd stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame, wearing a white cowboy hat and a gold chain around his neck. They both spoke very, very slowly, like cowboys in a Western.

"O.K., stop it right there," Tarantino said, pulling his chair even closer to the screen. "Let's look at 75 A-3 for that part when he turns back to Michael." Michael was Michael Madsen, who plays Budd. Tarantino watched closely.

Until you hear from me. You got that? Can you remember that? Till you hear from me.

"I like that part," Tarantino said, sitting back again. "I like that he has his hands right there in his crotch and everything." Zoe got up from her dog bed, wandered into the next room, came back, stretched, and collapsed onto the bed again.

That hat. How many times have I told you about wearing that hat in here? How many times?

"Did you have a favorite?" Tarantino asked.

"I kind of liked four the best, because it's him real spacey."

"Well, five seems like the spaciest one."

Five was spacier, but four was cleaner.

That hat. That fu-cking hat. How many times have I told you not to wear that fucking hat in here?

"Let's put five in and see if we can live with five, all right?" Tarantino said. "Because it's like when he first starts we don't even know what he's talking about. He doesn't even know—he's zeroing in on it."

Cash is the only thing you kids seem to understand.

The hat. That fucking hat. That fu-cking hat.

"O.K., let's look at some of these takes of him taking off his hat and see which one we like the best."

"O.K. Here's two."

Keep your hat at home.

Madsen looked down sadly at the floor, slowly took off his hat, and slunk out of the office. Tarantino giggled.

"O.K., three."

That shit-kicker hat at home.

Madsen looked down at the floor, took off his hat, and mussed his hair.

"O.K., four?"

Hat at home.

Madsen whipped off his hat, turned around, and left the office with dignity.

"Do you have a preference?" Tarantino asked.

"This one makes Michael sadder; the other one is more efficient," Menke said.

"I like the sadder one," Tarantino said, looking affectionately at Michael Madsen's morose face frozen on the screen. "Yeah, let's use two."

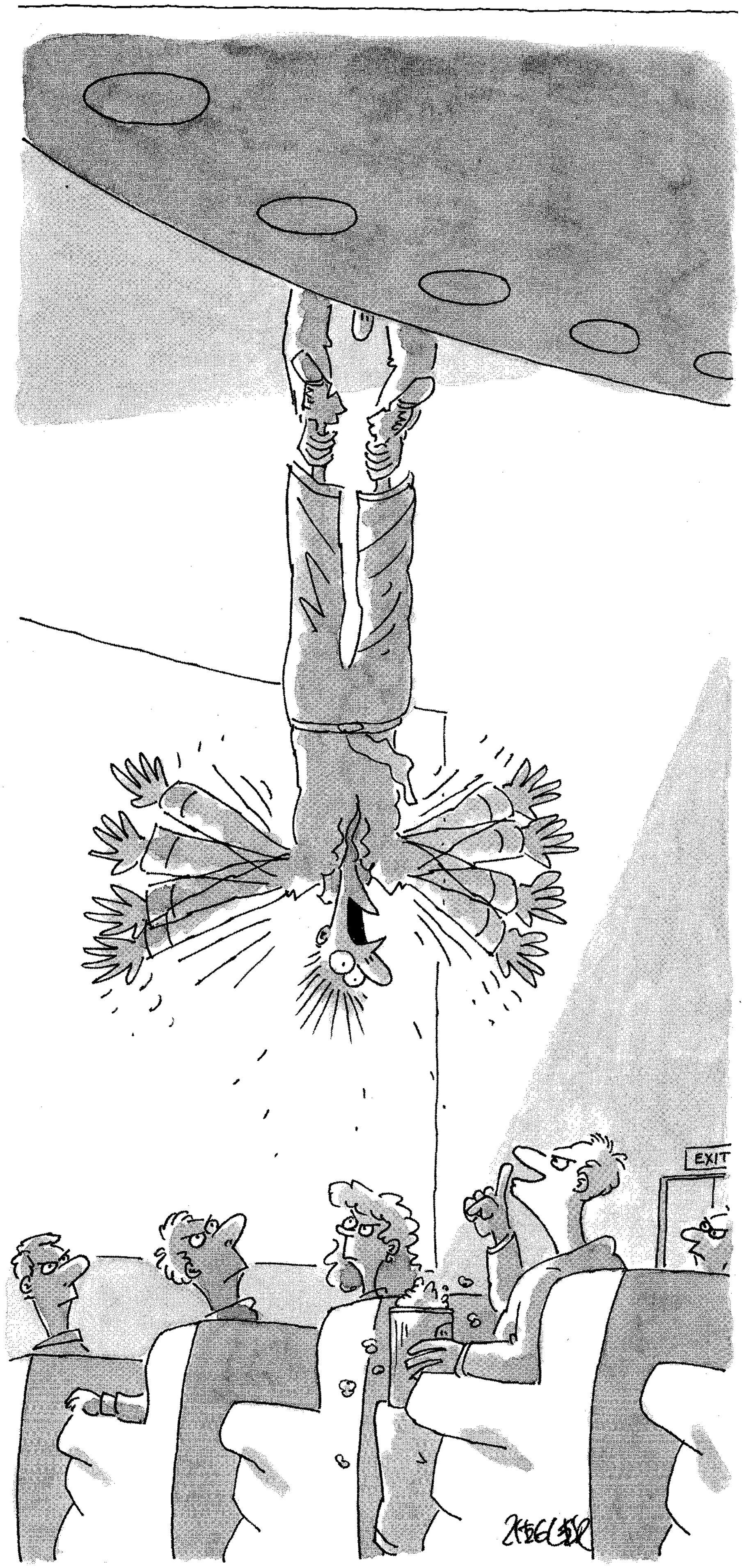
"Kill Bill" is, in terms of Tarantino's genres, an action movie and a chick revenge movie. At the beginning of the story, a pregnant bride, played by Uma Thurman, is shot in the head and left for dead on her wedding day, along with her groom and all their guests. She wakes up out of a coma four years later determined to kill the people who did it: the Deadly Viper Assassination Squad, of which she was once a member, headed by her ex-boss and ex-lover, Bill. The fact that "Kill Bill" is immediately recognizable as a Tarantino movie is interesting, because it has very little dialogue. Its wit is almost entirely visual: fake, glittery snow begging for bloodstains, an absurd B-movie rainstorm, a dazzling Japanese-style animated sequence, and headless bodies everywhere spouting geysers of blood of three different shades of red (though possibly only Tarantino can tell the difference)—Japanese animé blood, Hong Kong kung-fu blood, and American exploitation-movie blood.

"Kill Bill" is both more and less violent than Tarantino's other movies: more in the number of bodies, quantity of blood, and sound effects (the movie's blood makes just about every sound that liquid is capable of—dripping, running, gurgling, gushing, bubbling); less in the sense that the violence is stylized and funny, hewing to the Asian-fight-film Shaw Brothers conventions to which it is an homage. Because of the violence, Tarantino has made two different versions of "Kill Bill," one for America and Europe, one for Asia. (Tarantino does not consider himself an American filmmaker. "America is just another country for me," he says.) In the Asian version, the violence will be slightly more visible, more exaggerated. He knows now, from bitter experience, that if he indulges in flamboyant, over-the-top violence, American audiences and critics will talk about that more than about almost anything else: it will be taken seriously, as a ponderous moral issue. (Indeed, critics have already expressed outrage at the violence of the American version of "Kill Bill.") In Japan, on the other hand, audiences are used to gorier and more brutal scenes than anything a ratings board would permit in the U.S., and they take violence as he wants them to—as an especially thrilling and intricate form of choreography. (He often says that he considers violent action sequences to serve the same function in a crime movie that dance sequences do in a musical.) In Japanese cinema, he says, "the violence is big and the blood is big and they have major rape scenes and pedophilia's no problem. I mean, this is the country that developed the comic-book character 'Rape Man.'"

It's not just in connection with violence that Tarantino thinks about the audience. He loves nineteen-fifties, Douglas Sirk-style melodramas, but he says that he would not make one, because American audiences (unlike Asian audiences) are not now capable of appreciating the genre. They would take it as camp, he thinks, keeping their emotions in check, but for him the whole point of melodrama is to sweep you away. He thought that Todd Haynes's recent Douglas Sirk tribute, "Far from Heaven," suffered from this problem. "I thought it was terrific," he says, "but I didn't cry. How can you make a tribute to Douglas Sirk where you don't cry? I understand why Todd did it: he was afraid of getting bad laughs."

Tarantino hates focus groups as much as the next director, but it makes no sense to him to consider a movie in itself, independent of its effect on an audience. For him, the eyes and the mind of the audience are part of the thing—part of the performance—he is creating. And however actual, individual audience members react, there is such a thing as an aggregate of desires and expectations—a product of all the other movies and TV shows and stories the audience has absorbed, along with more general cultural currents. Pleasure depends, like most things, on history. Tarantino knows the history of movie pleasure better than anybody, he knows what an audience will be expecting and when, and he uses this knowledge to trap and shock. "I like fucking with your emotions, and I like it when it's done to me," he says. "That's my thing. You're gonna laugh, you're gonna laugh, you're gonna laugh, until you're gonna stop laughing. You're gonna stop laughing you're gonna stop laughing you're gonna stop laughing until boom you're gonna laugh again. The audience and the director, it's an S & M relationship, and the audience is the M. It's exciting! When you go out and have pie afterward, you've got some shit to talk about. You went to the movies that night!"

It's hard to pin down Tarantino's taste because he likes nearly everything: gangster movies, heist movies, action movies, coming-of-age movies, buddy movies, B-movies, men-on-a-mission movies, grindhouse, sexploitation, blaxploitation, kung fu, silent, New Wave, film noir, animé, animation, sci-fi, Second World War, horror, teen horror, Westerns, spaghetti Westerns, musicals, thirties studio comedies, teen comedies, thrillers, fantasies, epics, and romances. He has an insatiable appetite for cheesiness, and not just of the seventies variety—he even loves cheesy Hollywood movies that were made



recently. One of his favorite screenplays—he considers it fine literature—is "The Green Mile," Frank Darabont's adaptation of a Stephen King novel about a very large, childlike, retarded black man with supernatural powers who is accused of murder, which includes the following (representative) exchange:

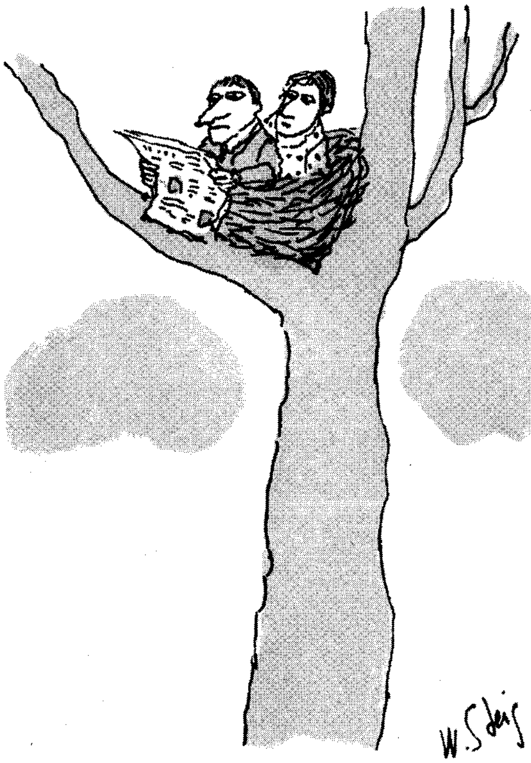
PAUL
I guess sometimes the past just catches up with you, whether you want it to or not. It's silly. . . . I haven't spoken of these things in a long time, Ellie. Over sixty years.

She reaches out, gently takes his hand.

ELAINE
Paul, I'm your friend.

PAUL
Yes. Yes you are.

It's not that Tarantino doesn't ever see a difference between bad movies and good movies, or between good movies and great movies. But whereas most critics are really interested only in the difference between good movies and great movies, Tarantino finds the other end of the scale equally fascinating. He is interested in the phenomenon of what might be called the good-enough movie: the movie that is basically terrible, but just good enough—its characters just lifelike enough, its plot just intelligible enough—to make you care. "One of the things I think is really kinda cool," he says, "is you can watch a badly done movie and maybe the two lead actresses are really crappy, or not really crappy, maybe they're just not that good, all right, but, God damn it, crazily enough you actually get caught up in the story and actually start caring about them and want it all to work out well. I *love* that." When Tarantino's detractors rage, then, about his asserting the influence of revered figures such as Godard and Howard Hawks, as though he were claiming membership in an élite canon, they are missing the point. It was not Tarantino but his fans who anointed him a canonical figure in that sense. Tarantino's own canon is so vast, so generous—indeed, so very nearly all-inclusive—that to claim membership in it amounts to little more than claiming to have finished a movie. In manner, Tarantino appears to possess the sort of intensely aggressive ego that would lead a person to scorn his competition and his predecessors, but he doesn't—instead, he appropriates them. By adoring them, he makes them his own.



News

WILLIAM STEIG, 6/21/82

There are few things Tarantino enjoys more than being part of an audience that is falling in love with an obscure genre movie of dubious virtue. It is for this reason that, every year or year and a half, when he has time, he goes to Austin, Texas, where his friends and fellow-directors Richard Linklater and Robert Rodriguez live, and puts on a Quentin Tarantino film festival. The festival screens prints from his unbelievably extensive collection, organized by genre, and usually consists of movies that nobody except Tarantino has ever heard of. The 1996 festival, for instance, took place over ten days in August, showed more than thirty movies, and included nights devoted to biker films ("The Savage Seven," 1968; "Hollywood Man," 1976; and "The Glory Stompers," 1968), Chang Cheh kung fu ("Duel of the Iron Fists," 1971; and "Seven Blows of the Dragon," 1972), cheerleader movies ("The Swinging Cheerleaders," 1974; and "Revenge of the Cheerleaders," 1976), and an all-night horror marathon that ended at five in the morning ("Cry of the Banshee," 1970; "Twisted Nerve," 1968; "Don't Go in the House," 1980; "The House on Sorority Row," 1983; "Horror House," 1969; and "Legend of the Wolf Woman," 1976). Tarantino also included two children's matinées, at which he showed "War of the Monsters" and "Mr. Superinvisible."

The festival was Tarantino's idea. Soon after he started making serious money, he began collecting prints. At first, he loved just showing them to friends, but then that was no longer enough. He had all these great movies, and he wanted to show them to lots and lots of people. To his satisfaction, the festivals have had an effect. "All of a sudden, everybody's writing on the Internet, 'How can I get "Brotherhood of Death?" '—some blaxploitation movie that I got," he says. "It's so exciting to see. It's also really great for me as an audience member to see what works, what doesn't, what still knocks 'em out. I'll show two kung-fu movies from the seventies, and when they're over the audience is, like, Yeah! God, that's one of my favorite moments in the movies."

At the festival, he introduces each movie, and then he sits down to watch it. He even sits through the all-night marathons. Sometimes something in the middle reminds him of a point he forgot to make in his introduction, in which case he'll yell it out from his seat. One thing he always remembers to say, though, concerns the spirit in which the movies are to be watched. They may not be the world's best movies, he tells the audience, but they are movies and, as such, are worthy of respect. If there is anyone in the audience who plans to laugh at them in a snooty way rather than laugh with them in an affectionate way, he would rather that that person not be there. Tarantino detests snootiness about genre films, or about any kind of films, for that matter. "I say to the audience, 'I *like* all of these movies,' " he says. "There might be apologies for this and that, and sometimes you might have to stand on your tippy toes to see what I see in them, and there's funny and wacky and silly stuff that happens, and it's O.K. to laugh at that stuff, all right—but don't laugh at the movie to show how cool you are. Wait till something's funny and laugh at that. Because I want you to get into it, and if you put up a force field of smugness you never will. Just leave. We'll give you your money back."

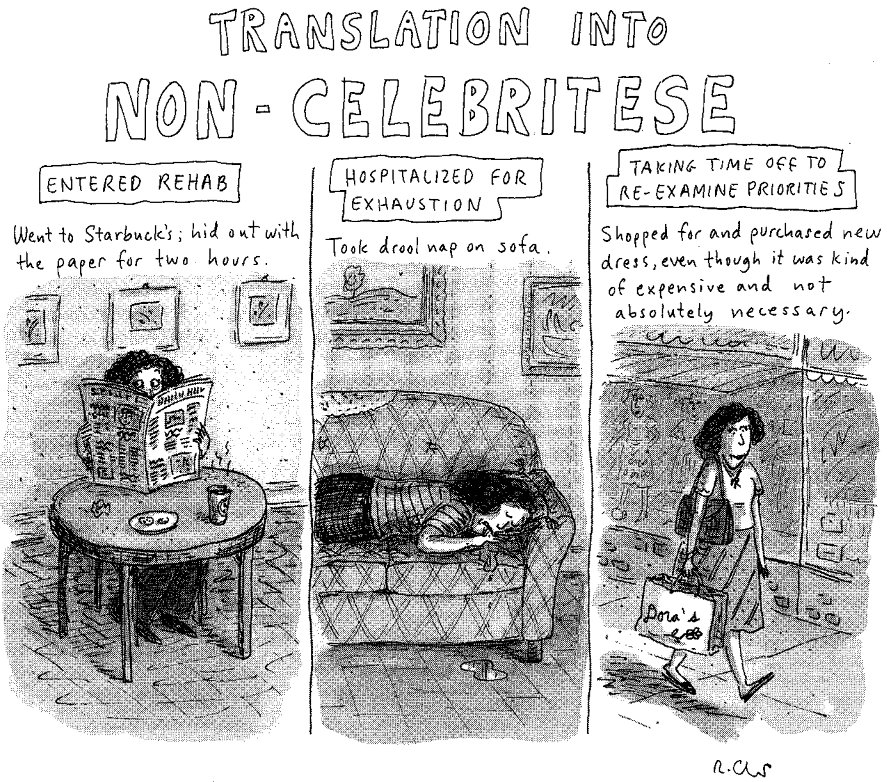
Given this attitude, one of the oddest features of Tarantino's reputation, among both his critics and his fans, is that he is held to be, above all things, an ironic director. Somehow, the most joyfully, almost puppyishly loving director in Hollywood has acquired a reputation for being the least. This is due in large part to all the pop-culture references in his films, which have received a bafflingly disproportionate amount of attention, as though his were the first films to make such allusions. The idea seems to be that pop culture and life are different, so if a movie is talking about pop culture it must not be talking about life. What's more, since the ironic person's attitude to pop culture is one of enjoyable disdain, then a movie that refers to pop culture must be designed to stimulate that same emotion. (Never mind that in every other form of art reference to the tradition is understood to be a sign of seriousness, and unselfconscious realism to be a sign of lowbrow ignorance.)

This drives Tarantino absolutely insane. "I *mean* this shit," he sputters. "I'm *serious*, all right! Maybe I don't even understand what irony means, but I really think that it just boils down to the fact that I know I'm making a movie: the fact that I know that I'm inside of a genre, or I'm subverting a genre, or I'm doing an effect for the audience is somehow ironic." The crucial mistake people make is to assume that because Tarantino is aware of genres he must also be detached from them. But anyone who doubts that Tarantino takes genres seriously should see "From Dusk Till Dawn," which he wrote and co-starred in, and which was directed by Robert Rodriguez. "From Dusk Till Dawn" is a movie that combines Mexican strippers who are actually vampires with a preacher who recovers his faith in God. It adheres rigorously to horror conventions—Tarantino was originally commissioned to write it by a horror-makeup company as a kind of infomercial—and is quite possibly the worst movie ever made.

Many, many people have described Tarantino's movies as ironic, but probably the one who gets to Tarantino the most is Paul Schrader. Schrader wrote the screenplay for "Taxi Driver," a film that Tarantino reveres, and over the years Schrader has told interviewers that Tarantino changed cinema—moved it away from what it had been when he and Scorsese made "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull"—and brought audiences with him. Schrader and Scorsese had presented the existential hero, he said; now Tarantino was introducing the ironic hero, and it was not clear to him whether he and Scorsese had a place in this strange new film world. It may be that, for Schrader, Tarantino's clever dialogue counts against him. The authentic, existential heroes of the late sixties and the seventies—Travis Bickle in "Taxi Driver," Kit and Holly in "Badlands," Joe Buck in "Midnight Cowboy," or any number of others—are so inarticulate as to be nearly mute (not counting voice-overs), and their inability to express themselves seems to be a sign that they are too aboriginal, too sincere, to be capable of translating their feelings into the currency of the world.

Schrader has said that he admires Tarantino's movies, but his underlying message is clear. "It couldn't help but creep in that his shit is authentic and mine's not, all right, or his shit is deep and I'm glib, all right," Tarantino says, his voice rising as he works himself up about it. "But I didn't buy *any* of what he was saying! I would be, like, what the fuck is an ironic hero? Clarence in 'True Romance' is not ironic! He's in love! To this *day* I get people asking me, Would you ever do a romantic movie? I *have:* 'True Romance.' And they say no, I mean a really romantic movie. Well, I think that's a really romantic movie! And they go, O.K., well, one without violence. I go, well that's not what you said! I'm not getting agitated. I just don't get it."

The problem with the irony charge is that pop culture and life are not separable for Tarantino. But pop culture and life are not separable for most people, any more than other sorts of culture are separable from life. People do, of course, have private lives and private memories that have nothing, or nothing con-


TRANSLATION INTO
NON-CELEBRITESE
ENTERED REHAB
Went to Starbuck's; hid out with the paper for two hours.
HOSPITALIZED FOR EXHAUSTION
Took drool nap on sofa.
TAKING TIME OFF TO RE-EXAMINE PRIORITIES
Shopped for and purchased new dress, even though it was kind of expensive and not absolutely necessary.
Dora's
R.Chast

ARTS AND CRAFTS • COMPOSER

SYMPHONY IN SEE

On a recent Tuesday, the composer Howard Shore left his hotel in London and climbed into a black Mercedes for the forty-five-minute drive to Watford, an unromantic suburb northwest of the city. There, in the Watford Colosseum, a municipal dance hall opposite a tanning salon, a sweetshop, and a pharmacy, Shore was working on the score for "The Return of the King," the last movie in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, a project that has occupied him for the past three years and will soon be completed. "I knew the acoustics of this Watford room," Shore explained. "It's been used on several classical records; the BBC uses it. Middle-earth is old. It's five to six thousand years preceding our culture. So it needed an antique sound."

Shore, a meditative, unhurried man who studied at the Berklee College of Music, in Boston, and spent the early nineteen-seventies touring with a progressive-rock group, was wearing sunglasses, an untucked black shirt, and loose gray trousers. "I'm a little tired," he said. "When I did the score for 'The Silence of the Lambs,' in 1991, it was written to the finished movie and we went to the studio and recorded it and that was that. It used to be an effort for a director to change a frame. You had to go back and clip it out manually, rebalance the reel. Now the digital technology is there to do these things quickly, and it allows much more fluctuation of the image. And if a frame moves it's a ripple effect. That's kind of what I'm in right now. The ripple. The big wave."

Peter Jackson, the film's director, was attending the session, but much of the "Lord of the Rings" cycle was created in a "virtual office" devised for the New Zealand-based production which enables the musical teams in London and in Tuxedo, New York, to upload their work onto a series of secure Web sites. "People sign in and sign out, and we chat and exchange things," Shore said. When he arrived at the Watford hall, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which would be playing the score, was gathering on the wooden floor, amid arc lamps and a thicket of microphones. On the musicians' stands were sheets marked "rotk 912 921b. The Black Gate Opens." Shore smiled, said good morning, went to his podium, and without further preamble directed the players to their place in the score.

He raised his hands. The music began with a tremor of low strings, swelled with the entry of the violins, and crescendoed in a fanfare of brass. It lasted about two minutes. After several run-throughs, everybody put on headphones. A red bulb lit up on Shore's podium, and an engineer announced the number of the take: "6084 of 912 921b, from 277, beat 3." A filmed sequence now appeared on a small screen in front of Shore—the actor Elijah Wood, as Frodo, silently battling a giant spider. The sequence was unfinished, and flashed between live action and early-stage computer animation. A circle of white light pulsed at the center of the image, and Shore conducted the music in time with it, looking fixedly into the screen and using crisp, unflorid arm gestures.

After three takes, Shore left the podium. On the stairs leading up to the control room, he said, "If we can get three minutes of music successfully recorded in a three-hour session, then we're doing O.K." Shore sat down at a table behind the mixing desk with a copy of the score open in front of him, and was entirely still as he watched a monitor and listened. Next to him, Peter Jackson, a bulky man with shaggy black hair and a straggly beard, lay almost horizontally in an office chair and intermittently dipped Chicken McNuggets in ketchup. "That lunge there should have more energy through it," Jackson said. "Go with the energy of the spider." At another point, he said, "This is about the scariest bit of the fight. I think it would be good if that change happened on the stab."

Shore nodded and then thoughtfully returned downstairs to the podium, where he began rapidly annotating his score while gently and calmly giving the orchestra instructions: "The trumpets should be muted at bar 29. We need a little more crescendo at 44. A little more accent in the low strings and bassoons at 47. The A at 62 is now on the downbeat and it's a half note. At 70, the accents should all be stresses. At 77, play the ink." The film rolled again. Afterward, Shore said, "Very good. Very nice. Very happy with that. Let's go to lunch."

—*Giles Smith*

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

sciously, to do with what they see in the cinema. But, after all, as a director, Tarantino is concerned not with individuals but with an audience, and the memories of an audience—those shared by a group of moviegoers—are memories of movies.

The other sort of pop culture that makes frequent appearances in Tarantino's films is what Tarantino refers to as minutiae. For every monologue he writes about an old movie or TV show, he writes one about European hamburgers or tipping waitresses or eating pork. He likes Nicholson Baker's novel "The Mezzanine," and thinks that someday he might want to make a movie like that—a movie that consisted simply of two people taking a long walk and talking about little stuff, the way "The Mezzanine" consists of a person riding one floor up on an escalator and musing about stuff like plastic straws and shoelaces. The love of minutiae, like the love of pop culture, is a form of nostalgia—a junk-food version of Proust's madeleine. But, unlike madeleine-nostalgia—nostalgia for a lost world, an unrecoverable childhood—minutiae-nostalgia is nostalgia for a world that still exists, for a life you're still living. It's a childlike emotion: a love of repetition; the homesick longing for an experience that took place only recently. Junk food and movies, being almost perfectly replicable, both cater to this longing; so it's no surprise that Tarantino loves junk food—although lately he's been on a diet—or that he, like a child, sees his favorite movies over and over and over again. (Nor is it a surprise that Tarantino, who is so in love with the past, tends to reject technology. He takes pride in not knowing how to type or use the Internet; he refused to get a cell phone until a short while ago.)

The minutiae thing didn't start with Tarantino: it started in the summer of 1989, with the release, in August, of Steven Soderbergh's film "Sex, Lies, and Videotape," and acquired critical momentum with the début, the following May, of "Seinfeld," the show about nothing. "Sex, Lies, and Videotape" began with the voice of Ann, played by Andie MacDowell, talking to her therapist. "Garbage," MacDowell said. "All I've been thinking about all week is garbage. I mean, I just can't stop thinking about it. I just, I've gotten real concerned over what's going to happen with all the garbage. I mean, we've got so much of it. You know, I mean, we have to run out of places to put this stuff eventually." It wasn't the first time, of course, that a character in a movie had spoken in such a startlingly normal, kitchen-table way, but it was surprising to hear that kind of speech so foregrounded, placed not at a slow moment in the middle but right at the beginning of the movie. When Tarantino did the same thing, beginning "Reservoir Dogs" with his infamous, over-discussed monologue about Madonna, minutiae became institutionalized as a routine in nineties movies, as Seinfeld had institutionalized such routines in TV. They had always been a staple of comedy, especially standup, but Tarantino introduced them into genre movies, where they were surprising. It was the "Don Quixote" move: to make comedy by combining a rigidly stylized genre with the humiliating banality of everyday life.

"I think it's pretty safe to say that directing is a young man's game. Directors really don't get better as they get older. I mean, after you've done it twice, you've got it. I don't mean it's easy, but you know what you're doing. I've been studying all these directors' careers, and, boy, you tell me the one I haven't thought of and I'll bow my head. When I was making 'Pulp Fiction,' I would have died for the movie, and if I don't feel that way I don't want to put my name on it. I almost feel that I owe it to people who like my stuff. I don't want to burn out, all right? If a guy like me likes my stuff, maybe he saw 'Reservoir Dogs' when he was twenty, or maybe he saw 'Reservoir Dogs' when he was my age, or maybe this guy I'm talking about isn't even born yet, all right? Maybe he's born today and he's going to catch up with my shit when he gets older. I don't want him to have to make excuses for the last twenty years of my career, because I've championed directors before and you're always making excuses. That's my big thing: I'm not going to burn out."

Tarantino turned forty this year, and he doesn't want to be making movies in his sixties, so he has twenty years left to work. If he continues to produce at his current rate—four movies in twelve years—he will direct six more movies, making a total of ten. This is not a lot for a major director, but that's the idea: he doesn't want to keep producing just for the sake of it. When he first started directing, he made two movies in a hurry because he had them stored up—he was backlogged with material, even after selling his scripts for "True Romance" and "Natural Born Killers." But after he made "Jackie Brown" he felt it was time to lie fallow for a while. He thought he might want to make a men-on-a-mission Second World War movie, so he read a lot of books on the subject, particularly about black troops, and he wrote a giant screenplay, long enough for three movies, that was a kind of spaghetti Western set in Nazi-occupied France. When he was younger, he wanted to be like Fassbinder, who made nearly forty films in ten years, but now that he knows how hard it is to make even one, he no longer sees the point in being so prolific. Better to restrict your output, keep it good, and live life in the meantime.

In twenty years, when it comes time for him to stop making movies, Tarantino will know what to do. He has already begun to contemplate his retirement. "I've started to realize that I'm a frustrated theatre owner," he says. "I'll move out of Los Angeles—somewhere where I can live to a hundred, maybe Montana or something, someplace with good air—and buy some little movie theatre. I'll have all my prints, and I'll just show them, and that'll be my thing. I'll be the crazy old guy in town that has that little movie theatre. That seems like a really cool old-guy life!"

If all goes as planned, then, the thirty years that Tarantino spends as a director will be only an interlude in the hundred years he will spend as a fan. He will make his ten films, and he will be proud of them. But he will know that, in the end, they will be only ten in the sacred archive of tens of thousands of fast, slow, cool, uncool, cheesy, brilliant, funny, startling, thrilling, wonderful movies that exists perhaps nowhere in the world in so beautifully preserved and complete a form as it does in Tarantino's mind. ♦

ANNALS OF ARBITRATION

CREDIT GRAB

How many writers does it take to make a movie?

BY TAD FRIEND

Two years ago, when James Schamus wrote a screenplay about the angry green mesomorph known as the Incredible Hulk, he had reason to believe that he could get the film made. For one thing, Ang Lee wanted to direct it, and Schamus had worked closely with Lee for years, producing as well as writing or co-writing many of his movies, including "The Ice Storm" and "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." For another, Schamus was the co-president of Focus Features, a division of Universal Studios, which owned the rights to the Hulk character and was eager to see him onscreen.

But there were also reasons for doubt. Eight successive writers or teams of writers had already spent seven years trying to craft a screenplay that would satisfy Universal. Adapting a superhero saga is a constraining task: you must write an "origin" scene that explains how the hero got his powers (the boyhood accident involving a dairy barn and a leaky beaker of plutonium which creates . . . Milkman!); every ten pages you have to throw in a "whammo" (the producer Joel Silver's expression for the explosions and car chases that keep audiences munching popcorn); and the movie must end, after a protracted struggle, with the supervillain gloating over the all-but-dead superhero—who suddenly deploys his powers in a hitherto unimagined way.

The earlier plotlines ranged from having Bruce Banner, the Hulk's mild-mannered alter ego, hang out with a delinquent teen-age sidekick in Las Vegas to having him undergo experiments for a mission to Mars. Every notion had been found wanting. But Schamus, who says that he essentially started from scratch, believed that he'd devised a new way in. His Bruce Banner is a mournful scientist who "Hulks out" after an accident exposes him to a massive overdose of gamma rays and "nanomeds" (which are tiny . . . well, it's very complicated). Banner winds up battling his long-lost father, "the Father," a rogue scientist who travels with a pack of mangy, genetically altered "Hulk dogs." Schamus's script was a weave of dreams and flashbacks, a Nietzschean meditation—punctuated by whammos, naturally—on the temptations of rage which also put forward the psychotherapeutic suggestion that men must kill their fathers, one way or another, to grow up:

> He walks toward his son, reaches out with his manacled hands.
>
> BRUCE BANNER
> No. Please don't touch me. Maybe, once, you were my father. But you're not now—you never will be.
>
> FATHER
> (Beat.) Is that so? Well, I have news for you. I didn't come here to see you. I came for my son.
>
> Bruce looks up at him, confused.
>
> FATHER (cont'd.)
> My real son—the one inside of you. You are merely a superficial shell, a husk of flimsy consciousness, surrounding him, ready to be torn off at a moment's notice.

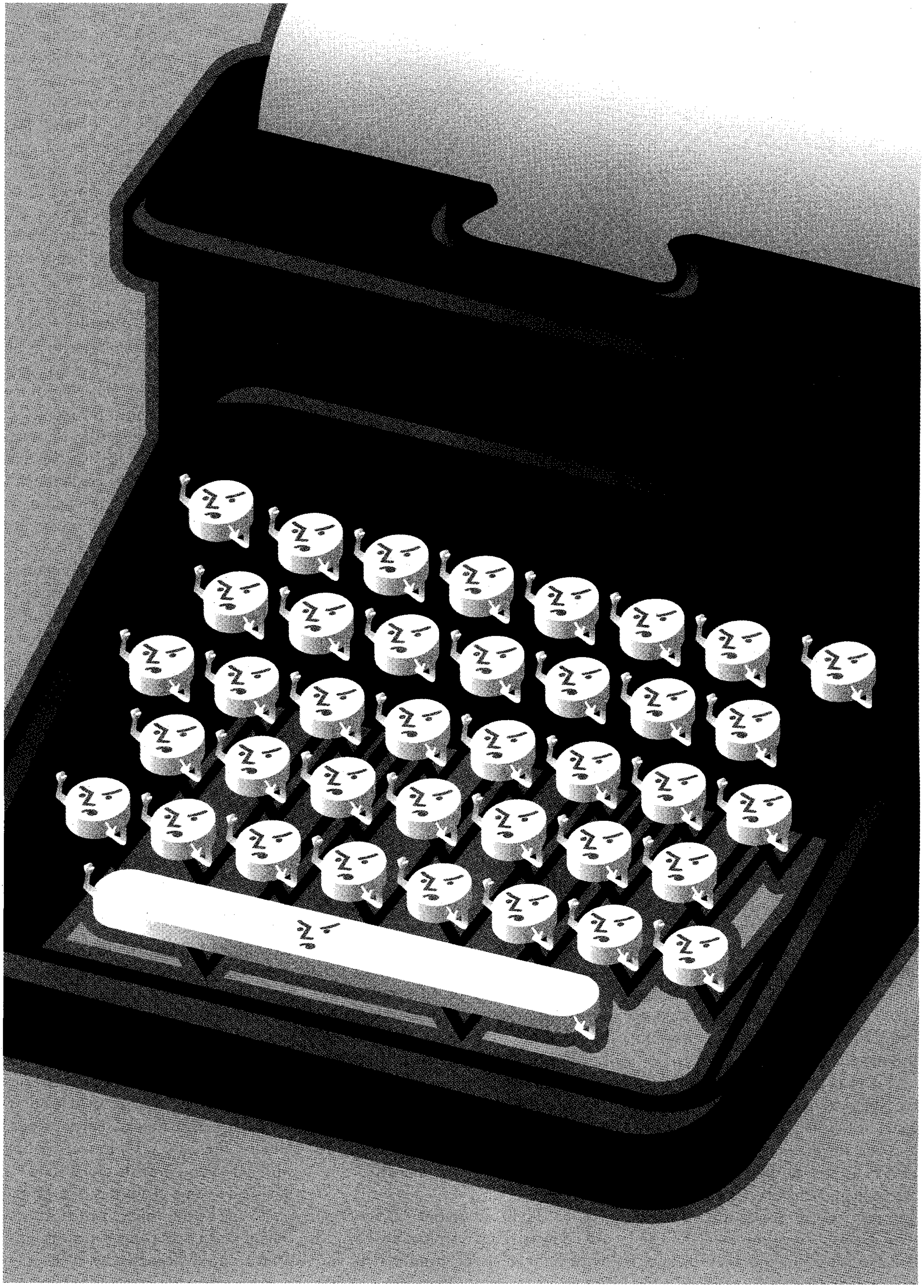
Cue Banner's inner child: the Hulk!

Universal promptly approved Schamus's draft, and Ang Lee finished shooting the hundred-and-thirty-seven-million-dollar movie last fall. Then it came time for Schamus to receive credit for his work, a responsibility that falls to the Writers Guild of America, the union of television and film writers. After a film wraps, the studio—which is, for copyright purposes, the film's "author"—sends the Guild a "notice of tentative writing credit." But any writer on a film can demand that the credit be arbitrated, and arbitrations are automatic if one of the credited writers is a producer or director of the film (the presumption being that he might have abused his authority to fiddle with the studio's tentative credit).

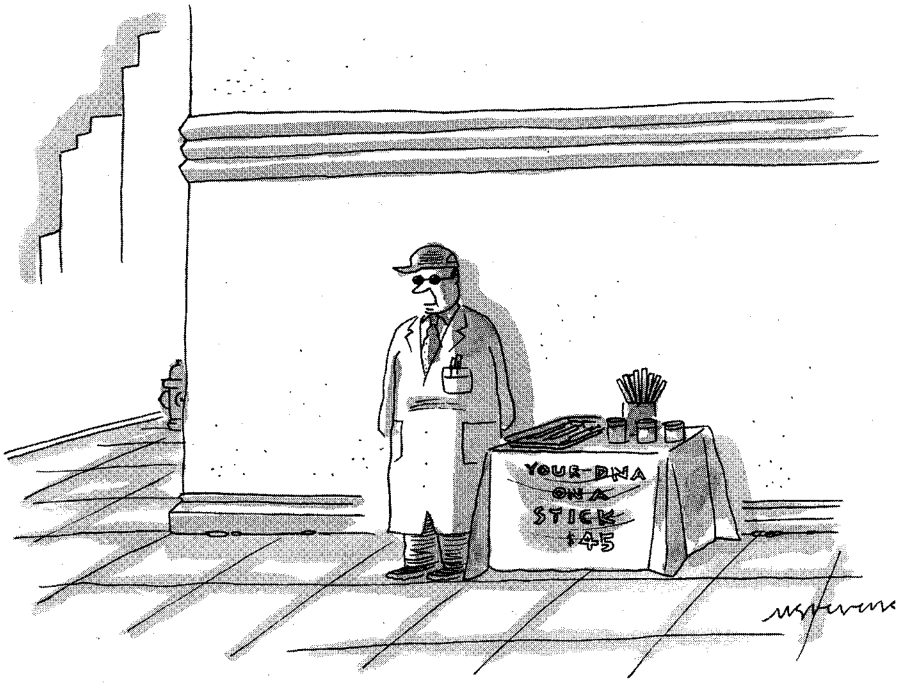
Of the two hundred and ten films submitted to the Guild last year, sixty-seven, or nearly a third, were arbitrated. The procedure requires that three anonymous Guild writers read all the screenplay drafts that the writers seeking credit want them to consider. (Following a recent rule change, this material is submitted anonymously, too: "Screenplay by Writer A," "Writer B," and so on.) The arbiters also read statements that the writers have put forth in support of their claims. Then they compare the individual drafts with the final shooting script to determine who wrote what. The Guild's credit standards are complex, but, generally speaking, writers of a screenplay adapted from another source, such as a novel or a comic book, need to have written at least thirty-three per cent of the shooting script to get a screenplay credit, while rewriters of an original script need to have contributed at least fifty per cent. The writer of an original screenplay is guaranteed at least a share of a "story by" credit—a lesser credit often awarded to those who lay out the basic plot and theme—no matter how much the script is rewritten. If a writer believes that the arbiters misinterpreted the rules, he or she can appeal the decision to a W.G.A. Policy Review Board.

Last October, Universal told the W.G.A. that it planned to release "The Hulk" as "Written by James Schamus." Because Schamus was one of the film's producers, arbitration was automatic. It was also extremely complicated. Five of the writers on the project decided to submit statements claiming credit, and three others left the decision to the committee. The arbiters had to digest fifteen screenplays filled with easily conflated Hulks who all swatted military helicopters from the sky, as well as five sets of additional revisions and reams of "source material" ("The Incredible Hulk" comic books). Determining the authorship of even one scene in a movie can require hours of hermeneutical analysis, followed by a pause for ontological reflection. The majority of arbitrations result in two-to-one verdicts, and sometimes all three arbiters disagree wildly, in which case another

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



You can get credit for a script even if you've written only ten per cent of it—and be denied credit if you've written up to half.



writer, a Guild-appointed consultant, usually coaxes two of them into agreement.

The perceived capriciousness of the rulings and the fact that the Guild requires its members to remain silent about the proceedings and refuses even to disclose whether an arbitration has occurred only fuel the screenwriters' chronic dissatisfaction. "If you win an arbitration, you only feel that was your due," Ron Bass, who has been involved in a number of arbitrations, says. "Whereas, if you lose, my God—somebody has just stolen your child and murdered it in front of your eyes." When Jerico Stone lost an arbitration on the film "Matinee" and received only a shared story credit—a result that is tantamount to the verdict "Your screenplay must have stunk"—he was so angry that he tried to replace his name in the credits with the pseudonym "Fuck." (The Guild said no.) A few years ago at a Policy Review Board hearing, a disgruntled writer came in waving a gun.

There is a class-war dimension to the typical arbitration. It often pits a low-paid "first writer," the one who had the idea and roughed out the plot but perhaps lacked the craft to make each character sound distinctive, against an A-list "rewriter," one of a small group of writers who get paid three hundred thousand dollars a week—and, occasionally, up to a million dollars a week—to "close" a film and make it shine. (Much of the time, these rewriters are actually writing their own original scripts, for as much as two million dollars.) "The arbitration issue is ultimately going to split the Writers Guild apart," Stephen Gaghan, the screenwriter of "Traffic," says. "The small group of name writers who fix every film is being arbitrated by—and discriminated against by—a bunch of guys who last wrote an episode of 'The Rockford Files.' "

After Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel wrote "Splash," in 1984, they were astonished when the arbiters ruled that they would share screenplay credit with the original writer, Bruce Jay Friedman, who also received a story credit. "We were very inexperienced," says Ganz, who went on to write a number of hit comedies with Mandel, including "A League of Their Own" and "City Slickers." "We thought because every word and every scene in the movie was ours we'd get the credit."

"We first met Friedman at the Oscars, when we were nominated for best screenplay together," Mandel says. "There he was, stuffing shrimp in his mouth and having a great time! Didn't write a word of the movie! Nice man, though."

The "Hulk" arbitration verdict came down in April. Arbiter No. 3 agreed with Schamus, declaring briefly and rather incoherently that "since Writer I"—Schamus—"took the material into such a different direction, giving the Hulk's main conflict with his father, that only Writer I should warrant written consideration." But Arbiters No. 1 and No. 2 detected other writers' rhythms and ideas in the shooting script. Although Schamus had said that the only "Hulk" script he had read was a notably different effort by his predecessor David Hayter (Writer H), arbiters are instructed to credit similar constructions to the earlier writer, on the theory that producers may have passed along that writer's ideas in conversation. By a two-to-one vote, the writing credit for "The Hulk" was established as "Screenplay by John Turman (Writer A) and Michael France (Writer C) and James Schamus (Writer I); Story by James Schamus."

It was an odd decision, to say the least. One problem, logically speaking, was that Turman and France were credited with writing the majority of a screenplay from a story that Schamus wrote years after they had both left the project. Another was that a Guild rule says that producers and directors who rewrite on a project need to contribute at least fifty per cent of the screenplay to get credit, and it is the customary Guild practice to list writers' names in descending order, according to their contributions. The "Hulk" credit implied that Schamus wrote at least fifty per cent but that Turman and France—who would ordinarily have had to write thirty-three per cent each to get credit—actually wrote more than Schamus, for a total of at least a hundred and fifty-two per cent. That's a lot of per cent.

Schamus was furious. "Only in Kafka-meets-Orwell Guildland could you get this result," he told me. "It's an advertisement for how screwed up the system is. If you can find *one* original thought from the earlier scripts that survived into mine, and that didn't come directly from the comic books—it just isn't there."

Michael France was furious, too—not at the verdict but at the fact that Schamus was complaining all over town about it. "Schamus's claim to sole credit is preposterous," France says. "He was writing within the framework that John and I established—same characters, same basic plot—and I wrote thirty-five to forty per cent of the film. But apparently you don't want to make Schamus angry, because then he turns into the monstrous Incredible Ego."

And although "The Hulk" was John Turman's first major screen credit, he was indignant that the Guild denied him a story credit. "The studio's internal summary of my script was, substantially, the movie," he says. Turman was also annoyed by his colleagues' reaction to the result: "I get comments like 'Great credit!'—as if I had won the lottery. The arbitration process is seen as divorced from writing itself, and if you win everyone thinks you just got lucky."

Screenwriters like to idealize their role, viewing themselves in the tradition of the solitary artist, their dialogue and action flowing seamlessly from keyboard to screen. A number of scripts do fit this model, such as Charlie Kaufman's screenplay for "Being John Malkovich" and John Patrick Shanley's for "Moonstruck," which he sold to M-G-M only on the condition that the studio not change a word. These scripts, by a single writer who often seeks to direct his own work (Woody Allen, Quentin Tarantino, and M. Night Shyamalan, for example), become "films."

But most Hollywood pictures, particularly those whose characters are given out in rubberized form in conjunction with the purchase of Happy Meals, have no particular author. They emerge out of market research and dovetail with the storytelling expectations of the wider commercial culture, the way popular ballads or Punch-and-Judy shows used to. When Robert Towne, the writer of "Chinatown," was hired for "Mission: Impossible II," the producers told him that the whammos had already been worked out in detail; all that remained was for him to add such minor touches as characters, dialogue, and plot. "They said, 'Here are the six big action sequences—can you write a movie connecting them?' " Towne says.

Projects like these aren't films but "movies." "The W.G.A. tries to sell this myth that movies are written by one guy hunched over a typewriter and then producers and directors come in and fuck them up," a prominent writer-director told me. "They hate the fact that movies are a director's medium, that to get a shootable script a movie has to be written by a lot of people, and that writers are disposable, replaceable, improvable-upon cogs in a machine. But that's the truth."

On movies, producers hire and fire writers as if they were migrant fruit pickers; "The Flintstones" alone employed thirty-two screenwriters. When the writers Susannah Grant and Akiva Goldsman met at a party not long ago, they recognized each other from the assembly line. Goldsman asked, "What number writer were you on 'Charlie's Angels'?"

"Thirteen," Grant said.

"I was sixteen!"

Neither of them got credit.

James Schamus thought that he had written a film and woke up after the Guild arbitration to discover that what he had actually done, in Hollywood's eyes, was help make a movie.

You could lay the blame for the writer's problematic status in Hollywood on Thomas Edison: although he invented the phonograph and developed the Kinetoscope projector, he never figured out how to yoke them to make viable talking pictures. In the silent-film era, there were no screenwriters as such, just hacks who roughed out adaptations of popular stories, gag men who came up with endless variations on the pratfall, and "titlists," who wrote the title cards. Until 1912, films were protected by copyright as single photographs. And by the time the Copyright Act was amended that year "authorship" had basically devolved to the businessmen who hired the cameramen and duplicated the prints.

After sound came into use, in 1927, Hollywood studios imported Broadway playwrights to provide dialogue. In the New York theatre world, the Dramatists Guild contract forbade anyone to change a word of a play without the writer's consent. But in Hollywood writers were treated like clerks. At the studios, writers often had to punch a clock and turn in eleven pages of material every week. Screenplay credits were whimsically assigned by the studios, and sometimes went to the producer's mistress.

The Screen Writers Guild, which would become the W.G.A., was founded in 1933 to redress this pattern of contempt; as a result, its credit procedures were designed less to determine the truth of who wrote what than to enhance the status of screenwriters. The Guild's first contract with the studios, in 1940, established its right to assign writing credits while adumbrating the organization's founding lie: that movies are created by a solitary writer, or by a nearly solitary writer, or, at any rate, by a writer and a few close friends. "To emphasize the prestige and importance of the screen play achievement," the contract said, "the one (1), two (2), or at most three (3) writers, or two (2) teams, chiefly responsible for the completed work will be the only writers to receive screen play credit."

The problem is that nearly every writer feels chiefly responsible for a script he has worked on. A few years ago, Paramount asked Cheryl Edwards to rewrite the script of "Save the Last Dance," which went on to become a hit starring Julia Stiles. The original screenplay, written by Duane Adler, was about Sara, a white teen-ager who moves to inner-city Baltimore, meets a young black guy named Patrick, and dances her way to happiness. In the course of her nine months on the project, Edwards changed Patrick's name to Derek, shifted the setting—the producers decided to film in Chicago—created a subsidiary love story, deemphasized the racially charged nature of the romance, and layered in a more introspective tone. But the basic story remained the same. In Adler's draft, Sara's new friend Chenille takes her to the

Triangle

WILLIAM STEIG, 5/25/92

dance club Feetz, where, in a character-establishing scene, Chenille rebuffs a lecher:

DUDE AT THE BAR
Damn, hoochie, you put a watermelon in them pants? Look at 'dat butt.

CHENILLE
You put a raisin in your drawers'n call it a dick?

DUDE AT THE BAR
Shiiit, bitch, you couldn't handle this.

CHENILLE
Don't need no "hand" for what you got.

In the draft of an intervening writer, Toni-Ann Johnson, "hoochie" was changed to "girl" and "bitch" to "hoochie." In Edwards's more extensive revision, the club was called not Feetz but Stepps.

They walk past a SLACKER in lycra pants and a big Army shirt. He licks his tongue at Chenille, grabs at her protruding butt. She swirls around, grabs his crotch hard enough to get his attention.

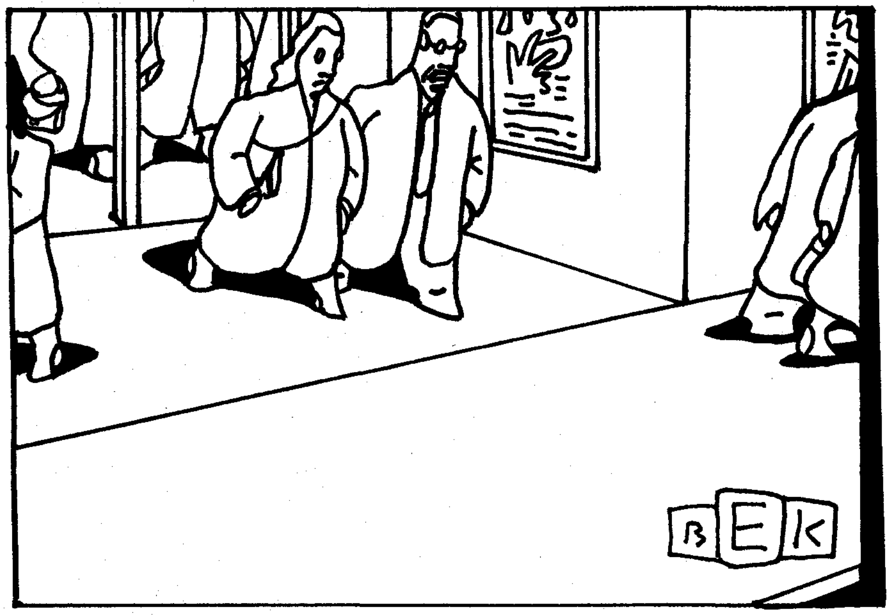
SLACKER
Aw'right, aw'right. You got it.

CHENILLE
Got what?
(he can't think of anything but the squeeze on his balls)
The right to walk past your greasy, tickle dick self without your paws on my ass? 'S'that how I got it?

So whose scene is it? When Adler, the original writer, read all the scripts for "Last Dance," he felt that Edwards had improved the film, but not so much that he shouldn't ask for arbitration on Paramount's tentative credit: "Written by Duane Adler and Cheryl Edwards." In her writer's statement to the Guild, Edwards, in turn, acknowledged Adler's contribution, saying that he established the blueprint and then she built the building. Because the "Last Dance" arbiters ended up making a factual error, the case had to go to a second arbitration, by which time Edwards was much less conciliatory. "Somebody saying they wrote the whole movie—it's tantamount to plagiarism," she says now.

The dispute intensified because both writers were seeking their first credits, and credits are a screenwriter's only currency. Even a successful writer may get a credit only every four or five years, and those credits are windfalls. A writer's agent can use a credit to bump his fee, or "quote," by two or three hundred thousand dollars per film. Credits usually entail a "credit bonus" from the studio—often hundreds of thousands of dollars—and also guarantee "residuals," a small percentage of the sales of the movie on cassette and DVD, to cable, and to foreign television. Although writers' residuals amount to only about three cents a video, on a film like "The Hulk" that can add up to a million dollars in the first five years.

A few months after the second "Last Dance" arbitration gave Adler an additional sole story credit, the two writers ran into each other at a W.G.A. reception in Beverly Hills. "He was like, 'Hi, Cheryl, it's Duane Adler!' " Edwards recalls. "And even just hearing his name swooped the scab right off the wound." She told him, "You know what, Duane? Thanks for taking ten years off of my life," and turned away.


"I wasn't in the mood for exquisite observing."

"I was hoping to talk with Cheryl about the movie and the excitement of our first credits," Adler says. "Here we were, both writers, both trying to make the movie as good as it could be, and we were pitted against each other. The studios use that, I now realize, to get extra work out of us. They're like, 'Hey, you might really be the guy if you do this one more free draft. We're with you all the way, just fix it a little more—you'll get a *credit*.' "

One of Hollywood's favorite parlor games is whispering about the films that So-and-So "really" wrote but didn't get credit for, the leading examples being "Erin Brockovich" and "Pretty Woman." "Everybody knows" that although Susannah Grant was awarded sole "written by" credit for "Erin Brockovich" (and received an Academy Award nomination for her screenplay), Richard LaGravenese wrote the movie after Julia Roberts brought him in to save the script. When Roberts accepted her Oscar for the film, she thanked most of the people she'd ever met and then said, "But, really, the main person—well, Richard LaGravenese and Susannah Grant, who wrote such a nice script."

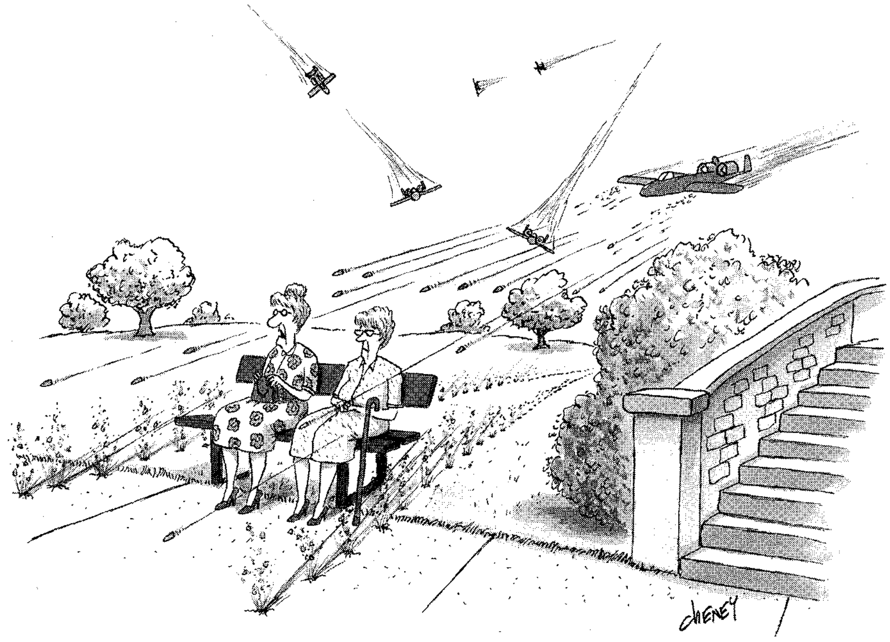
"Julia Roberts was telling everyone that Richard wrote the movie, down to her mailman and her gynecologist," Grant says. In the "Erin Brockovich" arbitration, the arbiters unanimously felt that LaGravenese's work—some mild restructuring and about twenty-five pages of new dialogue—did not meet the fifty-per-cent standard for rewriters of an original script. One arbiter said that LaGravenese's contribution "does not come close" to that mark; another wrote that, "scene by scene, Writer A's draft and Writer B's draft are almost identical." It was as close to a slam dunk as an arbitration can be. Yet the rumor endures. "It's incredibly painful and galling for people to say that the best work you ever did was written by somebody else," Grant says. "But they said the same thing about Shakespeare and Harper Lee, so I guess I'm in good company. And, other than carrying scripts around in my handbag and saying to every person I meet, 'Here are the three drafts I wrote, and I'd like you to spend seven hours reading them,' there's nothing I can do."

Likewise, "everybody knows" that although J. F. Lawton is credited as the sole writer of "Pretty Woman," it was Barbara Benedek's rewrite that turned the film into a hit. Lawton, an intense and friendly man known as Jonathan, labors under the imputation that he is an impostor in much the same way that the Ancient Mariner labored under his curse. "The 'Pretty Woman' situation for me is like how Sharon Stone probably feels about the crotch shot," Lawton says. "It made her famous, but she'd rather be known for something else."

Lawton's original 1987 script, entitled "Three Thousand," about a crackhead hooker who spends a luxurious week with a john at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, was intended as an independent film; it ended with Edward the mogul (ultimately played by Richard Gere) tossing Vivian the hooker (Julia Roberts) back into the gutter. When Disney released the movie, in 1990, Vivian had become a bubbly naïf, the last scene had Edward climbing her fire escape carrying roses, and the tone had become one of Cinderella feminism.

Lawton defends his credit on several grounds. He says that he worked on the project for three years—longer than any other writer, and at a much lower fee, a mere hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He also points out that Disney never changed the film's basic plot and structure, and that, furthermore, "Why on earth would a studio buy a movie they didn't like at least half of?"

The curious thing about the "Pretty Woman" legend is that the film's W.G.A. arbitration was essentially between Lawton and an intervening writer, Stephen Metcalfe, who was pivotal in turning "Three Thousand" into a romantic comedy. Barbara Benedek never petitioned for credit. "The story and structure were Lawton's, and it was a very beautiful script," she told me. "I didn't add a character—I just added character to Vivian's character, to who she was, whether she was flossing her teeth, or being into cars, or how she was with room-service waiters. I made her into this breezy, funny, happy hooker"—she laughs—"you know, one of those. I see those scenes now and feel, hey, that was a nice job. But it was his movie."



"Oh, God—It's going to be one of those days."

"The system we have now doesn't do J. F. Lawton any good; it just opens him up to ridicule and scorn," says Tom Schulman, the writer of "Dead Poets Society." "He can't say, 'No, clearly I must have written the movie, because I got sole credit,' when under our system you can write ten per cent of a movie and still get sole credit." If Writer A of an original script wrote ten per cent of the finished film, and none of the five or six subsequent writers wrote more than fifty per cent, Writer A would get sole credit.

"If I understand Jonathan correctly," Seth Freeman, the chairman of a W.G.A. credits committee, says, "he feels that if he went on a trek in Nepal, and the Sherpa said, 'What do you do?,' and he said, 'I'm a screenwriter. I wrote "Pretty Woman," ' the Sherpa would say, 'No, you didn't.' "

The three writers who were credited with the "Hulk" screenplay wrote scripts that seem, at first glance, quite different. In John Turman's nine drafts, Bruce Banner was a friendly nerd, "part Einstein, part Jimmy Stewart," and Leder, the villain, was "an unremarkable klutz." The dialogue was comic-book broad: Turman's General Ross was given to outbursts such as "Damnit, what in thunder happened out there?@!" and "Banner?! Alive?! How . . . ?"

Michael France, who co-wrote "Cliffhanger" and received story credit for the Bond film "Goldeneye," was hired on "The Hulk" in 1997, fired after he'd written an outline, and rehired four writers later. France's Banner was secretive and a touch hapless, and his villain, Dr. Samuel Sterns, was "a mercurial intellectual." France's dialogue mixed knotty exposition about Banner's "Gammasphere" with jaunty, blockbuster-ready patter:

COPTER PILOT (on radio)
Roger that, base—would you like your Hulk crispy, or extra-crispy?

James Schamus, of course, made Banner's father into his script's brooding centerpiece. Whereas Turman's Banner had an abusive father whom, in flashbacks, we saw arguing with his mother, and France's had a father who killed his mother "a little bit every day until it finally added up," Schamus's had a father who killed his mother one day all at once with a carving knife.

Schamus didn't bother to read any of the earlier scripts before writing his statement to the arbiters, a breezy two-page note in which he said, "I hope this one won't be so difficult." France's statement, on the other hand, ran to eight single-spaced pages, and Turman's to twenty. "I looked at the shooting script and the other scripts and realized, My God, there's a lot of my work here—I've really got a chance," Turman says. "So I spent a week writing that statement."

When arbiters are sitting down with more than a dozen screenplays to sift through, writers' statements become extremely important. Akiva Goldsman told me, "I wrote more words in my fifty-page statement for the 'Batman Forever' arbitration than there were in the script. It really does make a difference—I got credit."

According to the W.G.A.'s credit manual, there are four categories of screenplay contribution: "dramatic construction," "original and different scenes," "characterization or character relationships," and "dialogue." Story credit, on the other hand, is earned for all writing "distinct from screenplay and consisting of basic narrative, idea, theme or outline indicating character development and action." All these categories are so slippery that arbiters are given wide latitude in their interpretations. If you change "I love you" to "I really love you," the movie rolls on with barely a bump, but, Seth Freeman observes, "If you change it to 'I love you, and let me tell you why,' which is what Al Gore would say, you've changed the character."

The W.G.A. recently launched an advertising campaign called "Where It Begins," which points out that memorable tag lines such as "What we've got here is a failure to communicate" and "You can't handle the truth!" did not spring from a director's brain or from an actor's lips but were the creation of screenwriters (Frank Pierson and Aaron Sorkin, respectively). Implicit in the campaign is the belief that dialogue is a film's most important element. Yet the Guild's credit rules don't place a high value on dialogue, and Turman and France essentially argued in their statements that Schamus's dialogue was merely the showy tip of the writing iceberg, while ninety per cent of a movie's writing is the iceberg's undersea bulk of plot, character, and motivation. Turman is a law-school graduate, and he made use of his training in his statement. He contended that, in an action film, dramatic construction and set-piece action are more important than they would be in, say, "My Dinner with Andre." "In this case, more than most, selections from the underlying material . . . constitute much of the creative act of writing this screenplay," he argued. "Because in this case, the underlying source material—over 500 issues of comic books over 40 years—encompasses not a single story but a myriad of possibilities to choose from or disregard."

On adaptations, writers get credit for highlighting unique "screenplay elements" inspired by the source, but not for incorporating inevitable "story elements" that any writer would select. If you adapted "Moby-Dick," you would get credit for making Ahab into a peg-legged woman (a screenplay element); you wouldn't get credit for the whale (a story element). If, like Turman, France, and Schamus, you built your "Hulk" screenplay around a Bruce Banner who turns into a grunting green beast when he gets mad, who loves Betty Ross, and who spars with Betty's father, General Ross, it would seem that you had chosen inevitable story elements that are basic to the early Hulk comics. But Turman pointed out that, in some of the later comics, the Hulk manifested only at night, or when Banner pushed a button on a machine he'd built; that he was surprisingly loquacious; and that he had flings with girls named Jarella and April Sommers. Turman also used the fact that Writers D, E, and F pursued the Hulk-to-Mars dead end, with nary a mention of Betty or General Ross, to clinch his argument that his choice of characters, repeated by Schamus, represented a screenplay element rather than a story element. As for Schamus's villain, Turman told me, "My villain was also ill, and he also needed to get the Hulk's strength in order to cure himself."

France made a more narrowly focussed broad-similarities argument, claiming that his work—much of which was recapitulated in the one draft that Schamus says he did read, by David Hayter—anticipated many of the shooting script's plot points. These included the villain's capacity to become "Absorbing Man"; the extensive use of flashbacks to Banner's childhood; Banner's Gammasphere, which, France stressed, was not in the comics or in prior drafts; and the fact that Banner first "Hulks out" to protect Betty. France also said that he had cracked the tragic romance between Betty and Banner and was the first to introduce Banner as "an intense yet emotionally insulated character."

The two arbiters who found for Turman and France were clearly influenced by the statements. Arbiter No. 1 wrote that, "given that there is over 40 years worth of source material, the simple fact that most of Writer A's characters, as well as a loose version of his/her plot, made it into the final shooting draft, makes his contribution credit-worthy." Arbiter No. 2 noted that France's Gammasphere "does not exist in the comic strip," and that he had created Banner as "an intense yet emotionally insulated character." Arbiter No. 2 even gave Turman credit for a "sizeable share" of the dialogue, of which Turman himself acknowledges he wrote less than five per cent.

The members of the W.G.A. have changed their credit rules ten times, and still no one is satisfied. The most recent meetings to consider sweeping changes, last fall, began in a spirit of philosophical inquiry. Some writers pointed out that under the current system there is a huge incentive for writers to make changes for the sake of change, rather than for the good of the film. "If you make it forty per cent worse, you're going to get a credit, but if you make it ten per cent better you're not," the writer and director John Sayles has observed. Many writers agree that a few deft changes can have an enormous effect. Phil Alden Robinson, the writer and director of "Field of Dreams," says, "What's wrong with the credit system is let's say I write a story about Charles Foster Kane. He's born into poverty, inherits money, has a newspaper, and dies. The studio hires you to fix it, and you say, 'How about we start with him dying and saying "Rosebud," and throughout the movie we have a reporter trying to figure out what that means?' If you add up the pages in the 'Citizen Kane' screenplay, those scenes wouldn't amount to the W.G.A. minimum for credit. But that device is what makes the movie."

Not surprisingly, the debate soon degenerated into the perpetual conflict between first writers and rewriters. The first writers insisted that only a film's first writer should receive credit, even on adaptations. This camp's leaders—J. F. Lawton chief among them—viewed rewriters as scabs, at best, and circulated petitions including language such as "we don't want to give up our $50,000 bonus and residuals after working on a script for five years so an A-list rewriter can get his

$500,000 bonus and take our residuals for a few weeks of work. . . . WRITE YOUR OWN SCRIPT IF YOU'RE SO INCREDIBLY TALENTED!" These writers admit that limiting a film's screenplay credit to one writer would be a lie, but they argue that that practice would lead, over time, to greater respect for writers. More writers, they say, would reject rewrite work if there was no possibility of getting credit for it; studios would stick with their original writers longer; and, by the year 5108 or so, there would be only one writer on each project. The dream underlying the one-writer campaign is that all movies will become films.

Most of the Guild's A-list rewriters objected to being painted as greedy opportunists, particularly since the credit system already seemed to be slanted toward first writers. The rewriters generally favored lowering the contribution necessary for getting credit to twenty-five per cent, and listing all other writers in the film's end credits. And they observed that the reformers' rallying cry—"One writer, one film!"—was inane, because in many cases studios simply wouldn't make a film from a first writer's screenplay.

The Guild membership ended up passing three modest changes in the rules. The fourth proposal would have eliminated the heightened fifty-per-cent standard for production executives. As the vote neared, Lowell Ganz says, "I got a lot of hysterical calls from writer-directors trying to get the change voted in. They said, 'We're not doing it to steal credit, or to become writers; we *are* writers.' They pointed out that they were doing the same high-priced rewrite work for which they'd gotten credit before, but that now that they were directing the movie the assumption was that something nefarious was at work. Good points, but I instinctively voted against the proposal—my first reaction was to vote for the powerless." The production-executive proposal was rejected.

One reason screenwriters are so often replaced is that the script is the element of a project that's easiest for studios to change; they would rather replace a five-hundred-thousand-dollar writer during pre-production than lose a twenty-million-dollar star who hates the script after production has begun. Another reason, says Frank Pierson, the

ARTS AND CRAFTS • PROP MASTER

OBJECT LESSONS

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

On the first day of principal photography for Marc Forster's next movie, a surreal psychological thriller called "Stay," Peter Gelfman, a property master, is overseeing a peacock and a peahen in Central Park. For the entire morning, the birds must pose calmly while the actor Ryan Gosling stands nearby, smoking and gazing forlornly at the gushing fountain at the center of the Conservatory Garden.

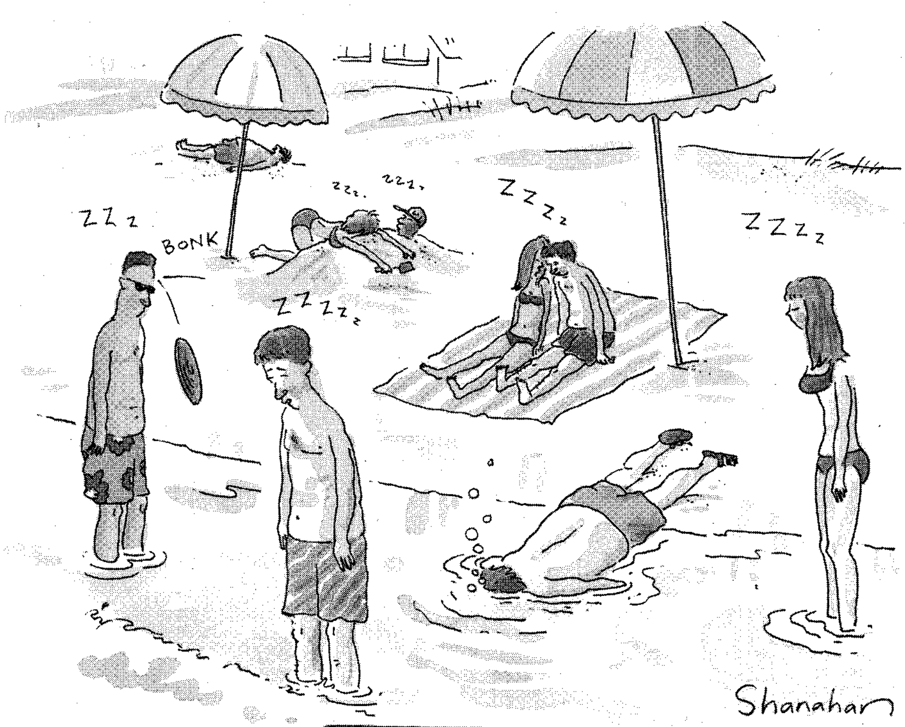
Of all the props that Gelfman has handled in his career (he's worked on the last eight Woody Allen movies), these are among the best behaved, partly because the female bird was brought along to keep the male in line. "Look, they're just staring at each other," Gelfman says. The scene also involves an eight-year-old boy who holds a shiny silver helium balloon, and fifty background actors who have been told to stroll about carrying silver bags or briefcases and old cameras and transistor radios. "We're trying to do a stylized thing here with background," Gelfman says. "A lot of muted monochrome. It's sort of subtle."

Roughly half of the props that Gelfman uses are his own, and he's always on the lookout for more: "If I see somebody on a great cruddy old bicycle, I'll offer to buy it off them." He shares, with two prop-master friends, a large warehouse space on a pier in Red Hook, Brooklyn, an Alexandrian library of stuff acquired over twenty years. Anything for which he doesn't have a just-right version must be found, bought, borrowed, or made—and then, often, altered. "We have a bunch of Ford Explorers that are involved in a later scene"—an accident—"and we have, like, five duplicates. A couple of them we bashed up pretty good," Gelfman says, scrolling through digital photographs of himself wielding a sledgehammer. "We also used a backhoe."

Because the prop master is also responsible, with the script supervisor, for prop continuity (making sure that water glasses are filled to the same level, sandwiches eaten to the same degree), Gelfman and his assistants take a lot of photographs—"pictures of someone's hand, or a spill of water on the ground, or whatever." One recent job, "The Secret Lives of Dentists," involved a lot of "vomit continuity," Gelfman recalls. "We filmed the actors heaving this stuff from their mouths, a purée of whatever they were seen eating, or just some lentil soup mixed with other stuff." For kids, they use instant oatmeal and food coloring. "And, depending on which take they use, for the cleanup scene we have to re-create the puddle the same way in the same spot. We use little swabs to sculpt the splatter."

Three hours into the shoot in Central Park, the camera has moved in for a closeup of Gosling. The eight-year-old has already let go of one balloon, and Gelfman is tying a replacement onto the boy's wrist. The peafowl remain calm, holding their pose.

—*Matt Dellinger*



CLUB MEDS

screenwriter of "Cool Hand Luke" and "Dog Day Afternoon," "is that screenplays are goddam difficult to write. The ability to compress emotion and ideas into a concatenation of visual images is a rare talent." Brian Grazer, the producer of "Liar, Liar" and "8 Mile," among many other films, says that there are only about fifteen writers who can take a script from good to great; Jerry Bruckheimer, the producer of "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Armageddon," suggests that the number is no larger than twenty. "And those writers are always busy," Bruckheimer says. "You want Tom Stoppard, you have to wait two years."

Because the cream of the A-list writers are always booked, Bruckheimer must resort to spinning through writers in the manner of an old-time studio boss, hiring them to fix specific problems. Producers like Bruckheimer call on Elaine May if they need a sprinkling of playful dialogue, on Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel if they want a few good, hard jokes, and on Robert Towne, one of his colleagues says, if they want "real drama, with a grown man sinking to his knees and sobbing." Paul Rudnick, who wrote uncredited acerbic dialogue for "The First Wives Club," among other films, was once asked to make a script more "cunty." He declined.

Studios almost always want two things from a revision: it should "raise the stakes" and "make us care about the main character more." A script doctor often accomplishes both feats at once by adding what the director Sidney Lumet has called a "rubber ducky" scene: a backstory explaining that a character became cruel or troubled because his mother took a rubber ducky away from him when he was a little boy. (The standard rubber duckies are being orphaned, being orphaned and poor, having your wife die, and having a bad woman do you wrong.) The director Garry Marshall gave "Pretty Woman" a rubber ducky when he spruced up the scene in which Edward lolls in the bathtub with Vivian and reveals that his father left his mother for another woman when he was young, taking his money with him, after which the mother died. "I was very *angry* with him," Marshall has Edward say, explaining why he became a corporate raider and plundered his father's company. "It cost me ten thousand dollars in therapy to say that sentence: 'I was very *angry* with him.' " Marshall told me, "When the actors are both naked in the tub, it's a good time to do exposition—the audience listens."

If the instinctive bias of most screenwriters who haven't had scripts produced is toward the first writer, then the instinctive bias of most successful producers and studios is toward the last writer. Brian Grazer says, "The heavy lifting is often done by the first writer." But he notes, nonetheless, that it was John Sayles's uncredited rewrite of "Apollo 13" that made the film great. "It seemed so unfair to me that he didn't get credit that I gave him his bonus anyway," Grazer says. "The first drafts had a lot of 'Top Gun' moments, with the astronauts ass-slapping in bars. John policed those out and also wrote whatever dialogue you remember."

Every script bears traces of its procession of authors, like rings on a tree stump. Carl Gottlieb, one of the screenwriters of "Jaws," has been a W.G.A. arbiter more than thirty times. "Reading the first version of something like 'The Terminator' or 'The Hulk,' you say, 'Oh, I see—that's why they bought it,' " Gottlieb says. "By the third or fourth writer, they're punching the material sideways. Then, two or three writers after that, a writer introduces one or two ideas that really make it work, and you think, This is a terrific fucking script. Then you read draft No. 9, and think, O.K., the director has put his stamp on it. Then No. 10, and the main character has much longer speeches: Aha, this is where Schwarzenegger signed on and they had to make him happy. Then you read the final script, No. 12, the movie you see, and it's O.K., but, boy, you wish they'd shot No. 7 or No. 8. The problem is the people responsible for fabulous draft No. 7 didn't have to worry about casting it, or about having a big opening weekend, which requires explosions, shattering glass, exploitative nudity, and a lesbian scene that the lead actress can talk about on Leno."

After losing the Guild arbitration, James Schamus finally read all the earlier drafts of "The Hulk." He then wrote a stinging nine-page letter to the Policy Review Board that would hear his appeal. On May 2nd, the three-person review panel and two Guild lawyers sat in the Guild offices and separately interviewed Schamus, John Turman, Michael France (by phone), and two other writers on the project, who had strong (and violently contradictory) opinions about the arbiters' ruling. Schamus pointed out that nowhere in their verdicts did two of the arbiters detail the four "screenplay elements" that Turman and France had supposedly contributed to the final script. When one review-board member, Gerald Ayres, said that, "with all the screenplays you read as an arbiter, you can get pretty tired and sometimes mixed up," Schamus shot back, "That's called dereliction of duty."

None of the oratory mattered, however. Before the writers testified, the review-board panelists did discuss the strangeness of the original ruling. "But after all the writers had testified we had ten minutes of discussion, tops, then upheld the original verdict," Eric Hughes, the chairman of the "Hulk" review board and the writer of such films as "Against All Odds," says. "We never called Arbiter 3 to see if he had read all the material, for instance, and in the past he's told me that he 'leafs through' things."

This kind of rubber-stamping is commonplace. When George Huang appealed the arbiters' verdict on "S.W.A.T.," arguing that one arbiter had mistakenly credited another writer for his ideas, the board observed that it is "not permitted to read the literary material for purposes of independently judging writers' contributions to the final shooting script." If the board couldn't look for significant factual errors, what could it do?

"The review boards tend to be composed of older, crankier writers who think that anyone who protests a decision is just one of those awful young writers after credit and money," says Hughes, who is campaigning to change the system. "I've been on at least fifty P.R.B.s, and none of them have overturned the decision. None!" (The Guild acknowledges that Policy Review Boards overturn decisions "less than one per cent" of the time.)

Schamus still harbors notions of suing the Guild, as a number of aggrieved writers have done before him. Almost all of those suits went nowhere, but in 1987 Gore Vidal sued the W.G.A. and a screenwriter named Steve Shagan, alleging that the proceedings under which Guild arbiters gave Shagan sole credit for the script of "The Sicilian" were unfair. The court found that Vidal had grounds to proceed, and that decision was upheld by the California Court of Appeals, which observed that Policy Review Boards could appear to provide "rights which were merely illusory."

Vidal's suit looked promising. But then he came up against the limits of the screenwriter's role, credited or not. As Vidal's lawyer, Bert Fields, recalls, "After we won in appellate court, I got a call from Gore. 'I saw the film,' he said. 'Get my name off of this piece of shit!' "

As the crowd was filing out of the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles after "The Hulk" 's première, in June, John Turman spotted James Schamus. A producer friend of Turman's, seeing that he planned to introduce himself, whispered, "Don't! He hates you!" But Turman thought, What the hell.

As Schamus tells it, Turman said, "I'm your co-writer."

"Which one?" Schamus asked.

"John Turman."

Turman then said, "You know, now that I've seen the movie, there's a lot less of my stuff in there than I thought," and Schamus replied, "Now you're telling me!"

Turman insists that this never happened: "Once again, he's rewriting." He says that he introduced himself to Schamus by saying, "I'm John Turman. I was the first writer," and, careful not to give Schamus sole credit for anything, went on to say, "I think you and Ang did a great job."

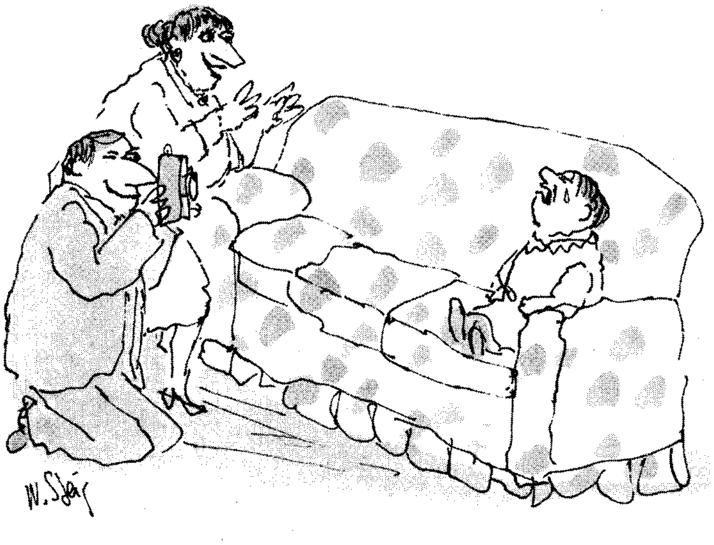
Both men say that the conversation continued genially, and they found themselves in cautious agreement that the arbitrated credit was odd—although each man thought so for different reasons. "I realized," Turman says, "that Schamus's rage is not at me; it's at the Guild for daring to treat a James Schamus as they would a John Turman."

As they were parting, Turman told Schamus, "I know the studio was initially pushing to do a 'Scooby-Doo' type of thing, but you and Ang got some serious themes in there. I had the father in one of my drafts, but the studio insisted I take him out."

Schamus, thinking that Turman's father character bore no relation to "the Father" in his script, said simply, "Well, time passes, and maybe they were ready for it."

Turman walked away feeling proud of himself for not saying that he thought the film's ending—the one part of the film that he freely grants Schamus wrote alone—was gibberish. By trying to avoid writing the traditional death struggle, Schamus may have outsmarted himself: in the movie's final scene, the Hulk and the Father grapple in a frozen lake bed, as is standard, but then Schamus's Hulk decides to relinquish his powers to the Father, which somehow leads the hubristic, all-absorbing Father—who must also soak up a nuclear bomb dropped just then by General Ross, who has proved to be the good father that Banner never had—to explode. As Schamus explains it, "The Hulk sacrifices himself to defeat his enemy, which is, in the person of his father, really himself."

It was this personal, heartfelt, and ultimately incoherent ending that helped doom "The Hulk" 's prospects; the movie made sixty-two million dollars its first weekend and comparatively little thereafter. Audiences left scratching their heads and told friends to go see "Bad Boys II" or "Terminator 3" instead, good old-fashioned summer sequels written and rewritten and re-rewritten to a state of inventive predictability by the usual group of anonymous writers who never get enough credit. ♦



"Just one more, darling."

WILLIAM STEIG, 2/29/88

PERSONAL HISTORY

MY LIFE AS A PAULETTE

The story of a short friendship and a long obsession.

BY DAVID DENBY

I became a follower of the *New Yorker* movie critic Pauline Kael, or a "Paulette," as her acolytes were later derisively known, in the spring of 1969, when I answered a summons and showed up at her apartment, at Ninety-third Street and Central Park West. I knew her only slightly. I had been introduced to her two years earlier by Paul Warshow, the son of the critic Robert Warshow, and we had met a few times since and had laughed a lot—in person, she was always funny. I was a graduate student then, hiding on a shadowless California campus and putting off my life as much as I could. I guess I was trying to find a way to ease myself into writing. I had sent Pauline some short movie reviews, and she knew that I had written a letter to *The New York Review of Books* teasing the hostile shenanigans of the avant-garde troupe the Living Theatre. The letter wasn't much, and it was never printed, but Pauline demanded to see it.

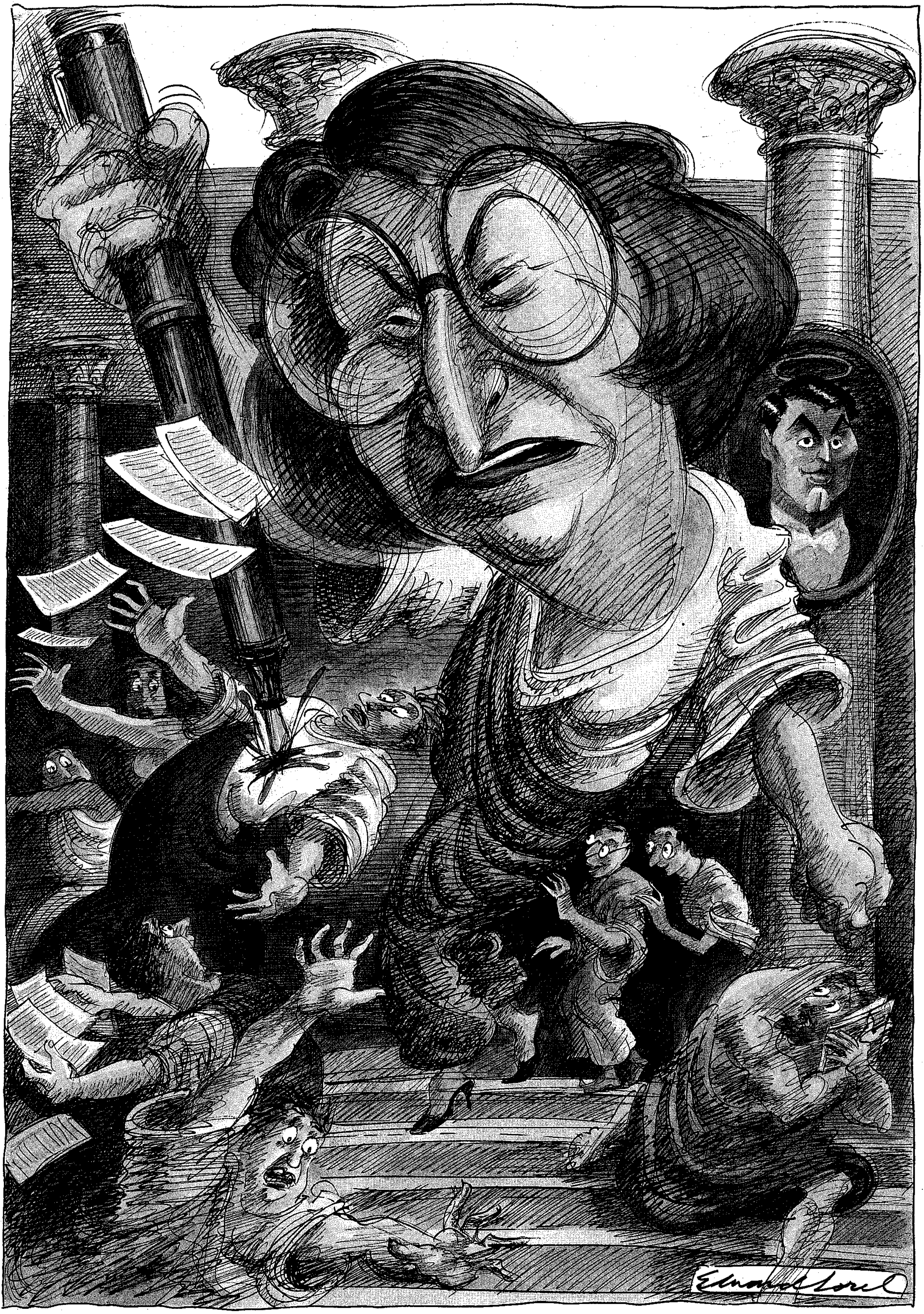
"Give!" she said when I entered her apartment. She snatched the pages from my hands, and, without looking them over, began to read to her guests, a documentary filmmaker and a publishing executive. Pauline read the letter the way that she read her own work on the radio—slowly, with a schoolteacher's weighted emphasis that brought out the structure of the sentences. My heart pounded violently, and my ears must have turned red. I knew that hiding was no longer possible—the public reading was some kind of laying on of hands.

Not a singular honor, of course. Pauline had taken up many young people before me, and took up many more later on. Young readers who dropped her a combative note about something she had written, or who sent her pieces they had written themselves, even in a small-town newspaper, might get called up and asked over. Pauline, who lived with her twenty-year-old daughter, Gina James, liked having company at night when she wasn't working. The Central Park West apartment, an odd, inviting place, had become a kind of minimalist writing-and-talking theatre. A previous tenant had knocked down a couple of walls, leaving an irregular open area facing the Park. Pauline worked on a slanted architect's table, which dominated one side of the room; her narrow bed was behind it, only a few feet away. In the center of the room there was a round oak table illuminated by a hanging Art Nouveau lamp. At night, the lamp created a pool of light, and Pauline, facing the windows and the Park, would sit at the table and sip a glass of watered white wine, often with her legs folded under her. Laughing steadily (her laugh was itself a vibrant commentary), she argued with the guests, leaping up now and then to provide food or drink or to kiss one of the barkless, shorthaired dogs—basenjis—that lived with her and Gina. She praised, ardently and in detail, and she blamed. Mainly she blamed, scalding the reputation of virtually every writer in town.

She had recently completed her second year at *The New Yorker* (she and Penelope Gilliatt alternated in six-month periods), writing sentences with a brazen force unknown among the magazine's critics at the time. The sainted Ingmar Bergman, she wrote, had become "a tiresome deep thinker of second-rate thoughts . . . the Billy Graham of the post-analytic set." About "Charly," the Cliff Robertson–Claire Bloom weeper, she wrote, "And now there's 'Charly,' with that primitive, garbagey appeal that seems to reach through sophistication and education right to the primordial jerk. College students study Ionesco and Beckett and Artaud and then respond to—'Charly.' A surprising number of people seem to be educated beyond their own tastes." She wanted to pep up the readers' notions of what art could be, and, quickly, in the first two years, she set out her belief in the hybrid nature of the movie medium, celebrated D. W. Griffith's "Intolerance" and the career of Luis Buñuel, dismissed English directors as inept, and made a case for "Planet of the Apes." Her column was the most exciting regular writing about movies to have appeared in English since James Agee gave up his job at *The Nation*, in 1948. Two years before Pauline arrived at the magazine, the paperback version of her first collection of pieces, "I Lost It at the Movies," had been published, and sold more than a hundred and fifty thousand copies, an almost unimaginable number for a book of criticism. At forty-nine, she had suddenly become successful and famous, and she was at once, in rather bewildering combinations, cocky, overbearing, and friendly.

Pauline Kael was short (five feet), and she usually wore a flowered print shirt, slacks, and sneakers. Except for her eyes, which were a beautiful blue and darted this way and that, she was an ordinary-looking woman who spoke in a breathy, liltingly feminine voice (it was teacherly only when she read aloud). In that soft voice, however, she tore through conversations like a projectile. The first time I met her, she couldn't believe that Paul Warshow and I had enjoyed "The Graduate" or that we had identified with Dustin Hoffman's Benjamin, a silent naïf adrift in a world of rancid adults. She sighed, giggled, and then said, "Do you think that grownups are predatory and corrupt?" Her voice reached into upper registers, suggesting that all of rationality lay on her side, none on ours. Well, no, we didn't think that. More sighs and musically insinuating questions: "How could you identify with someone who doesn't have an

Pauline Kael surrounded herself with a circle of young writers, and took on the world. Illustration by Edward Sorel.



idea in his head?" Well, we shared some of his feelings. "But he's a blank. Aren't you projecting your own feelings onto him?" She asked questions, she poked you to see what you were made of, and then she knew: some people had it, and some didn't. There were taxi-drivers who knew what a good movie was, and there were famous intellectuals, including more than a few movie critics, who did not.

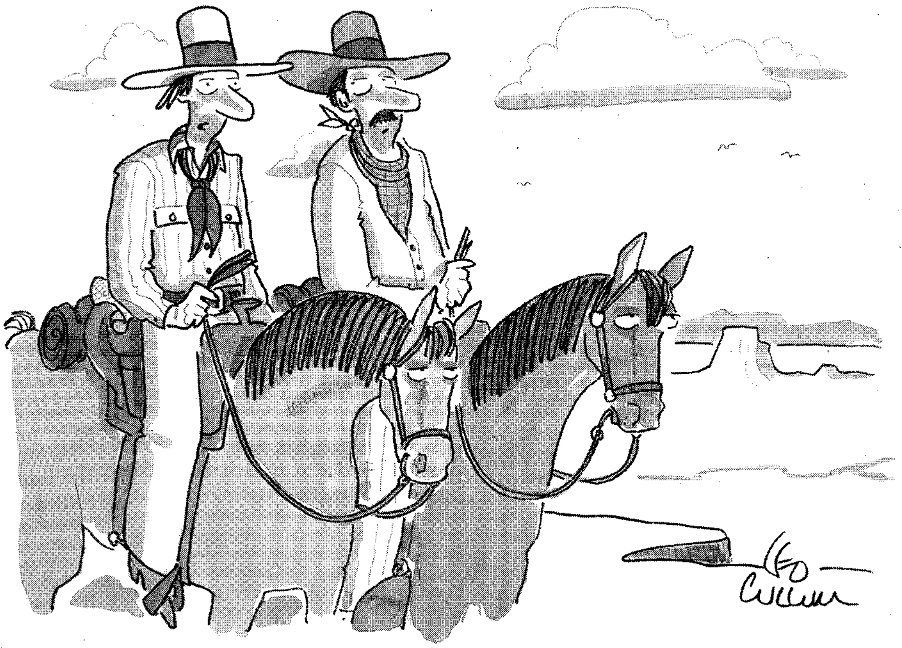
Still, I must have said something that impressed her as sensible or I wouldn't have been invited back. In all the years since then, I have never met a person so quick to understand what someone else was up to, so eager to honor ambition in the arts. Not all her friends were young, but she had a special way with the young, rousing the intellectual appetite and worldly ambition in a surly twenty-five-year-old stuck in a pointless job or a graduate student drifting toward a half-dreaded academic career. Paul Schrader, who had intended to become a minister in the (Calvinist) Christian Reformed Church, spent a night drinking and arguing about movies with her and fell asleep on her couch. In the morning, Pauline told him he should be a movie critic, not a minister, and she helped him get into film school and then recommended him for a reviewing job; later, he became a writer and director of movies. In those days, she was nearly magical in her powers, a good witch with a wicked tongue. If you said something unfortunate, expressing a distaste for, say, Aretha Franklin or Claudette Colbert or Barbra Streisand or a liking for Joan Crawford or John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, she would gasp and offer a summary judgment on your taste, sometimes addressed to another person in the room ("Gee, he's really a very conservative boy, isn't he?"), but usually offered with such humor and cajoling affection that those who didn't turn away in anger were convinced that she was rough on them for their own good. At least, that was the promise.

Pauline Kael was motherly but brilliant, erudite but entirely informal, morally alert but as bawdy as a San Francisco madam. She never pretended that she was objective or above the fray, and she refused to place her opinions on the table as just another view. She insisted that she was right about everything, and you would be right, too, someday, if you worked like hell and stayed loose. To anyone in flight from the academy, she offered a shackle-breaking song of liberation: you didn't need the citations, the habits of obeisance, the props of authority; you had to experience an art form directly and then stand your ground. What she said and wrote came out of her reading and viewing and also from her life; and so, for many of us, her tossed-out judgments on movies and books, and, particularly, the remarks she aimed at us, kindly or razor-edged, were accepted as a pure expression of spirit—an authentic, spontaneous creation. People sought her praise so energetically because there was little chance that she would ever give it out of politeness. And when it arrived it was enthralling. Literally so—some people became addicted to it and belonged to her forever.

Pauline had hung around with poets and artists in New York and San Francisco when she was young, but she had no mentor herself—she was self-created—and she never used the word, which she rejected in interviews as corny and false. Perhaps it's obvious why she found the subject embarrassing: over the years, she consciously attempted to shape the careers and the morale of scores of young people, and she accepted their love as her due. Most of the young critics were men, but Pauline wasn't, as far as I could see, looking for lovers; she vamped us intellectually and, so to speak, morally, insisting that we had an obligation to give ourselves completely to writing. She probably never could have accumulated so extensive a brood if she hadn't been female and welcoming. Yet, in her affectionate way, she was more interested in dominating other people than anyone I've ever met.

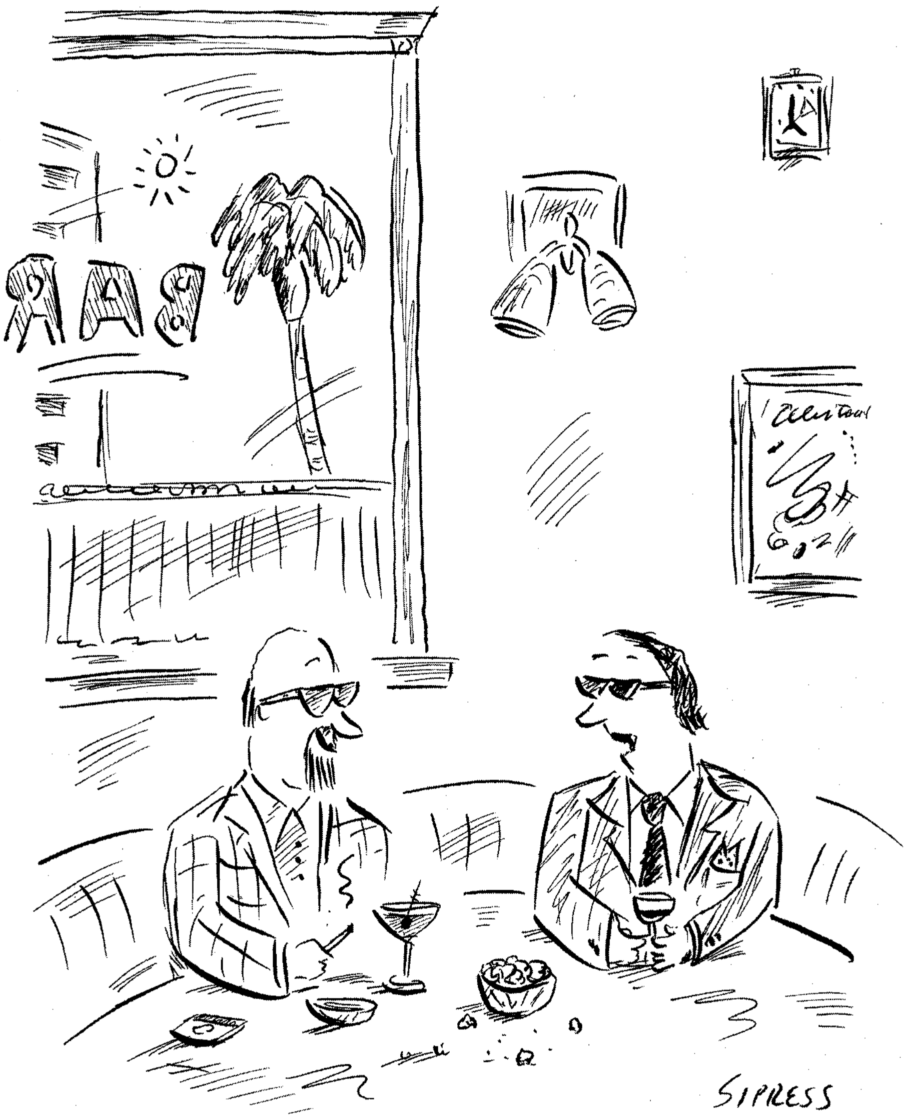
To be included in the pool of light around her table and to exchange opinions and to hear the work of well-known people debunked was an electrifying experience for a young man or woman struggling with self-doubt. She read our writing with violent attention, implying that she cared more about what we wrote than we did ourselves, an outrageous presumption that nevertheless kicked many a stalled writer into gear. "It's shit, honey," she said to me about one article still in the works, "and if you don't make it better I'll stick pins in you." She was highly encouraging, sometimes impassioned on my behalf, and full of shrewd career advice. At the end of the summer, while I was still a graduate student, she recommended me for a movie-reviewing job at *The Atlantic Monthly.*

Those who started out in film criticism in the late sixties and early seventies—everyone, not just Pauline Kael's friends—slowly realized that they had stumbled into a happy moment. After



"What's the point of being your sidekick if the courts won't recognize it?"

years of the Vietnam War, the culture had attained a degree of bitter self-knowledge, a mood more conducive to good popular work than the shocked rage and frenzy of the sixties, which yielded movies that were, too often, pushy and consciously Zeitgeisty—"Easy Rider" careering out of control. Things were settling down aesthetically; suddenly, art was possible—the audience, sometimes in sizable numbers, was up for it. Young American directors like Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, Brian De Palma, Woody Allen, Steven Spielberg, Hal Ashby, and the documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, taking advantage of that mood, were just beginning to work, and critics led the charge for them. We were just a bunch of journalists, not revolutionaries, but, still, there was a spirit of insurgency in the air, and we were part of it. Like the boldest of the rock critics, Pauline was sure that American mass culture at its best was plugged into the country's most vital instincts—anti-authoritarian, subversive of cant and lies and genteel feelings, individualistic but yearning for community. "Good movies make you care, make you believe in possibilities again," she wrote in 1969. "If somewhere in the Hollywood-entertainment world someone has managed to break through with something that speaks to you, then it isn't *all* corruption. . . . Sitting there alone . . . you know there must be others perhaps in this very theatre or in this city, surely in other theatres in other cities, now, in the past or future, who react as you do."



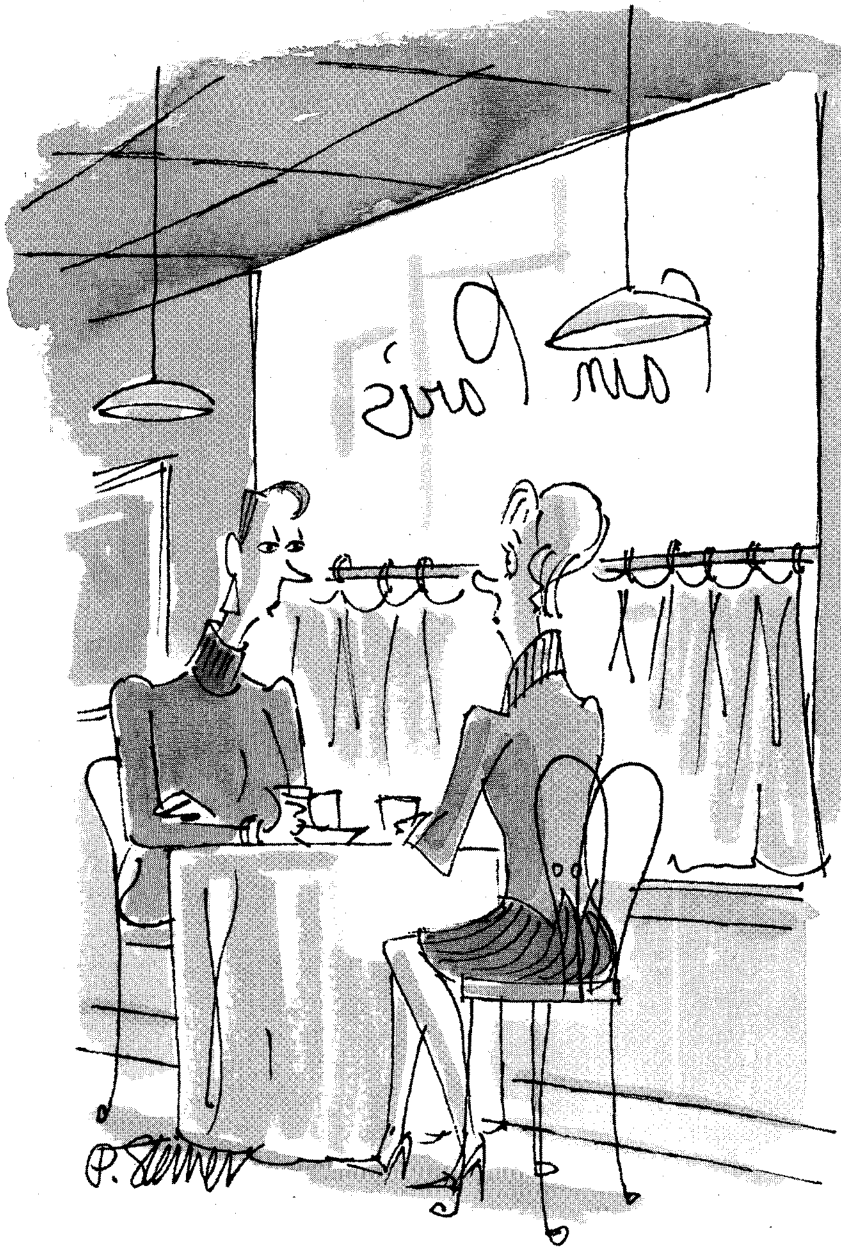
"That thing you just said—I'd like to option it for a movie."

The people she had gathered around her made up one such community of moviegoers. Hoping to expand that community, she promoted an explosive American popular art in which violence and eros were joined together, an art freed of the formal rigors that she thought often squeezed the life out of European high culture. In that period and just after, many young critics worked under the aegis of Pauline's canonical anti-canonical statement from "I Lost It at the Movies":

> There is more energy, more originality, more excitement, more *art* in American kitsch like *Gunga Din*, *Easy Living*, the Rogers and Astaire pictures like *Swingtime* and *Top Hat*, in *Strangers on a Train*, *His Girl Friday*, *The Crimson Pirate*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Lady Eve*, *To Have and Have Not*, *The African Queen*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, or more recently, *The Hustler*, *Lolita*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Hud*, *Charade*, than in the presumed High Culture of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Marienbad*, *La Notte*, *The Eclipse*, and the Torre Nilsson pictures.

In 1970, as that specifically American energy was breaking through in movies like "M*A*S*H," I quit school, and returned to New York, where I spent a fair number of evenings at Pauline's apartment gabbing until two or three in the morning. "That's enough for you," she would say, with a laugh, when we were both too tired to speak. Sometimes I needed another hour or two to calm myself down before I could sleep. Pauline had made me a writer, or at least a jobholder—and, it turned out, a member of an increasingly notorious group of disciples. Around town, a look of misery and fatigue (what, *another* one?) passed over the faces of established critics when I ran into them.

Pauline Kael had many friendships, and other people will have different stories to tell. What I know of her is largely confined to my own observation and experience, much of it dating back thirty years or more. In my hearing, she never revealed much of her earlier life (which she regarded as a failure), except for the things that everyone knew—that she had grown up on a chicken farm in Sonoma County, California, and had gone to Berkeley in the late thirties as a philosophy major but had run out of cash and had not graduated. She had



"I'm getting a preëmptive divorce."

been married and divorced at least a couple of times, had worked as a seamstress, a nanny, an advertising copywriter, and other such jobs while struggling to find a steady reviewing berth. When I asked her about her early writing, she mentioned plays and philosophical essays and sighed, "Oh, you know, honey, it was dead, it was shit." In the late fifties, she ran twin film-revival houses in Berkeley—"They made money, *pots* of money"—and in the sixties she did critical broadcasts on KPFA, the renegade radio station.

In the pieces she wrote in the sixties, Pauline presented herself as a Western country girl, direct and plainspoken, a natural democrat observing East Coast "cultural snobbery" from a happy distance. She was not impressed by fancy art talk and big reputations and what she took to be the pomp of degrees and job titles. Some of this self-mythologizing was just rhetorical bluster. Pauline was an intellectual—she learned a lot more from *Partisan Review* than she did from the chicken farm. She was an intellectual, however, in a raucous style perhaps not seen since the bohemian rebels of the twenties. Her early years of success in New York, in the late sixties and early seventies, caused a sensation, but often a sensation of loathing, since she couldn't hide her contempt for the ruling critical powers in town. From her point of view, she was merely telling them off for their own good. A number of critics piled up anecdotes against her, and waited for her to go up in a puff of smoke. Their frustration was palpable, but what could they do? If they took her on, they got knocked off their feet, more often than not, by a lightning comeback. "John, you're too old still to be writing like a punk," she informed the elaborately educated Europhile slasher John Simon at a meeting of the National Society of Film Critics. Some of the men walked away muttering, "Ball-breaker."

This charge, which I heard many times, completely missed the point. Far from hating macho, she had a deeply romantic appreciation of such leathery types as John Huston, Sam Peckinpah, and Robert Altman. She loved the swagger and panache of critics like the Australians Clive James and Robert Hughes and the young American James Wolcott. The problem with the American movie critics was that they weren't ballsy *enough*, or at least not in the right style. One of them once described her in print as a "wet hen," and for years she congratulated herself for not calling him a "dry rooster" in response. Despite her self-censorship on this one occasion, she believed in assertion, not in reticence or modesty, though she couldn't stop herself from correcting almost every assertion she heard. And every self-evaluation. She had the peculiar notion that people should possess exactly the right opinion of their own achievements. If you were mistakenly cast down, she would raise you up; if you had a swelled head, she would shrink your cap size. She became a sort of self-appointed vicar of criticism. She wanted to straighten out the world.

Apart from bestowing recognition and straightening us out, what did she offer the young group that gathered around her? The most important thing was the sizzling example of her own practice. Week after week, she resisted fashion and studio-bought publicity and celebrated, when she could, the creative life in unheralded movies made by fresh talent. "When I discovered that 'Pretty Poison' had opened without advance publicity or screenings," she wrote in 1968, "I rushed to see it, because a movie that makes the movie companies so nervous they're afraid to show it to critics stands an awfully good chance of being an interesting movie. Mediocrity and stupidity certainly don't scare them; talent does." She looked below the surface of a movie without ever giving up on that surface, which is where the action was—the glowing, transfigured flesh, the hurtling movement, the sensuous and erotic power that drew people to the medium in the first place. She dealt firmly with studios and even with directors (Altman, Huston, Woody Allen, Warren Beatty), those overwhelmingly seductive creatures whom she sometimes befriended and, sooner or later, amid cries of betrayal, panned. Her young friends were amazed, for here was the real thing, a genuinely independent person existing as an American writer with singular force. She was indifferent to clothes, casual about worldly goods. She loved her power to influence, and she wanted people in the movie business to listen to her, but she didn't give a damn about power's outward trappings. One of the minor highs of hanging out with her was to see publicists, directors, and other critics quail before such an unprepossessing-looking person.

Though she was more than capable of taking care of herself, she brought out a streak of protective gallantry in the young men around her. Several times in the seventies and eighties, I baited one of her enemies in print, an act unasked for, unappreciated, and entirely unnecessary. He hit back, of course, and announced that he would not shake my hand. (We long ago buried the hatchet.) At the time, critics, conscious of themselves as minor public figures with a following, and fuelled by the certainty that something serious was at stake—they fought over the auteur theory and film history, violence in the movies, the value of pop, the quality of Godard—struggled for the allegiance of young reviewers like rival rabbis preparing a bar-mitzvah boy.

Fearless herself, Pauline created courage in others. But she also created conformity in some of the same people, and that paradox produced not only trouble between the two of us but also the public talk of Paulettes. You couldn't agree with her too quickly or you lost her respect, but, in the end, you did have to agree; in my experience, she could not remain friends for long with anyone who consistently fought her. She lovingly bantered with the people drawn to her, but if we held to our opinions she pulled the rug out from under us. The generic form of her rug-pulling was "Oh, honey, you've never been fucked by a bear." That is, we had never been down and out, living in a cold-water flat, selling goods over the phone; we had never taken care of someone else's children or done the kind of body-numbing chores she had when she was young. This was certainly true. We were mainly upper-middle-class boys falling out of university and into journalism. Still, I thought, anyone who loved movies, no matter how protected he was, had the right to an opinion. I was not normally submissive, and neither were any of the others, but we acquiesced in the bullying, in my case with increasing discomfort. The group became a cult that never admitted its existence, a circle that never discussed its exclusions, a set of friends that never acknowledged how much enmity lay outside it, not even after articles had been written fingering her acolytes, complete, in some publications, with mug shots.

WILLIAM STEIG, 1/25/82

It was not just Pauline's insatiable need to win arguments that made sustained disagreement with her so difficult. There was something in the nature of movies as well—a peculiar aesthetic indeterminacy that she understood and celebrated and also used opportunistically to quell other people. As far as Pauline was concerned, there was no curriculum or method that one had to master in order to write criticism, though she certainly had a personal canon: all the movies mentioned in the passage quoted earlier from "I Lost It at the Movies," and screwball comedies in general; the films of D. W. Griffith, Abel Gance, Jean Renoir, Preston Sturges, Vittorio De Sica, Carol Reed, and Louis Malle; the early work of François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Bernardo Bertolucci; the American directors of the seventies; the screenplays of Jules Furthman, Ben Hecht, Herman Mankiewicz, and Robert Towne; the acting of Cary Grant, Laurence Olivier, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, and Marlon Brando. She enjoyed such film-school perennials as the early films of René Clair, Sergei Eisenstein, and Carl Dreyer, but she was sure that there wasn't a single academic tradition in film that couldn't be overturned in an instant. As a field, film aesthetics was eternally in a state of becoming. It had to be that way, for the movies, as she never tired of saying, were the mongrelized bastard child of the arts—a compound of theatre, photography, the novel, carnival, pornography, journalism, and exploration—and any pure-cinema definition or even descriptive grammar (montage or deep focus or, later, "the male gaze") omitted too many of the miscellaneous and even anomalous pleasures that were part of the fun and the art of movies. In writing about movies, you had to know film history and had to have seen a lot, but, finally, no method or aesthetic was sufficient. Readiness was all—everything that you were and felt, which you put on the line every time you offered an opinion, no matter how trivial.

Pauline wanted sensation in the movies, not the banality of serious "themes," and she believed that sensation, at its most intricate and demanding, could force audiences into complexities of response unknown in the other arts.

ARTS AND CRAFTS • WEAPONS COÖRDINATOR

POINT-BLANK

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Rick Washburn, a weapons coördinator, has a disarming way of greeting people: "Are you the guy that needs the 9-millimetre?" He works out of his loft apartment, a converted doll factory in SoHo. Truncheons, scimitars, and pipes lean against one wall, while a cat sleeps on the desk. A large walk-in safe contains more than three hundred guns, and that represents only a small part of Washburn's arsenal; there's a lot more in the basement. A casual glance inside the safe reveals a Civil War-era repeating rifle, an imposing grenade launcher, and a semi-automatic with the words "Read Manual Before Use" engraved on the barrel. There are also at least seven of those really small silver pistols that a special agent will pull from her stocking at an opportune moment.

If you are not a weapons coördinator, being around so many guns can make you feel giddy. You may get the urge to pick up an M16 and intone, in Rambo's hushed, hurt voice, "They drew first blood, not me!" Washburn has witnessed this kind of behavior before. When he brings his guns to the set, the actors often take the weapons and start "cowboying around with them." He has a little demonstration that helps dampen the Old West atmosphere: He borrows an apple from craft services and then fires a blank, execution style. The apple explodes. A blank creates a burst of hot gases that's powerful enough to burn through a human arm. It's essentially a miniature blowtorch. Because of the danger, Washburn reserves a special scorn for actors who like to "improvise" during gun scenes.

Washburn came to New York in 1979 to study acting and, perhaps because of his affinity for bodybuilding, he was often cast as a hit man. While appearing in one movie, he noticed that the prop people didn't know their stuff. Washburn hails from a part of Arkansas where it's not unusual for your sister to have a firearm, so he decided to offer his advice. That led to another job, and he eventually started his own company, Weapons Specialists, Ltd. Beginning with "The Cotton Club," in 1984, Washburn went on to furnish and supervise weaponry for "Billy Bathgate," "Cop Land," "Godzilla," and "Universal Soldier: The Return." If you want a war, he can do medieval, colonial, civil, modern, and future. He knows a guy in Jersey who can get you tanks. He's been in the business long enough to see Dirty Harry's .44 Magnum be replaced by the .50-calibre Desert Eagle as the weapon of choice when someone wants to make a statement.

In a typical movie bank robbery, Washburn may use four different kinds of guns. There's the blank-firing gun, which simulates the correct action of the weapon (kickback, sound, and muzzle flash); a replica, which has plastic moving parts and is therefore less likely to jam; a non-gun, which produces just a photographic flash, and is used for close work; and the stunt gun, which is made of lightweight rubber and can be thrown off a rooftop. (And, for the record, there are at least four kinds of knives: real, rubber, retractable, and reservoir, which conceals a supply of fake blood.)

Of recent films, Washburn admired the final shootout in "Open Range," but he considers most cinematic gunmanship to be bogus. "It's not their fault, but directors watch movies and they get bad ideas," he says. They believe that a revolver fired at a car will cause it to blow up, when you would be lucky to puncture a tire. They expect every whizzing bullet to make a ricochet sound—*ping!*—instead of the loud *pop!* that it actually produces. They instruct actors to wield a machine gun like a hair dryer, whereas a professional would fire three rounds in successive bursts, conserving ammunition. If directors really wanted authenticity, gunfights would be short and lethal and a lot of guys would fire without looking. A person might not even know he's been hit until after the fight is over.

According to Washburn, a few movie conventions do turn out to have a basis in fact. You can shoot someone several times, for example, and he'll still continue to dodge and weave, because "you could be just putting holes in him." It's also very easy to miss a target at close range several times, as always seems to happen when Bruce Willis gets caught in a tight spot. Almost all cinematic gunfights mix fantasy and reality—this haziness can create problems when you are the weapons coördinator. (At least two actors have died while fooling around with blank-firing guns.) Whenever anyone asks Washburn to do something risky with one of his weapons, he asks the person in question to demonstrate on himself. That usually ends the conversation.

—*Michael Agger*

Sensation would inevitably arouse the brains of the canniest moviegoers, for the senses and the intellect were combined, not opposed. No critic I'm aware of has longed so passionately for faces, bodies, landscape, décor, clothes, sex, and violence while demanding, at the same time, that a movie hang together morally. At her most rapturously exultant, as in her review of Scorsese's "Taxi Driver," in 1976, Pauline approached the ecstasy of synesthesia:

> Scorsese's New York is the big city of the thrillers he feasted his imagination on—but at a later stage of decay. This New York is a voluptuous enemy. The street vapors become ghostly; Sport the pimp romancing the baby whore leads her in a hypnotic dance; the porno theatres are like mortuaries; the congested traffic is macabre. And this Hell is always in movement.

At the same time, she insisted that the movie's alienated landscape was a protest against "urban indifference." This constant tangling and untangling of the sensual and the ethical kept her judgments fresh, even startling: people who thought she was a lowbrow pop extremist, beating her tomtom in excitement, would be brought up short by her furious indictment of the violence (which now looks tame) in "The French Connection."

For Pauline's young disciples, the ability to exercise that multidimensional responsiveness meant that we were good. But would we remain that way? At its happiest, the group embrace of a great new movie by Altman or De Palma was an exalted communion of believers bringing the news to an indifferent outside world. "You're *with* this?" Pauline would ask at screenings, with a squeeze of the hand. But the experience of being squeezed wasn't always pleasant. Since critical standards are, by their very nature, unstable, the fear of being wrong, or of missing the subtle and seemingly contradictory ways of being right, was intense. None of us ever spoke of the fear in such abject terms, or spoke of it at all, but it was there nonetheless. It wasn't discipline but freedom of the most flagrant kind that Pauline demanded—license, with quick penalties (her scorn, followed by group ridicule) for a mistake. In the end, the sense of election, and the fear of losing it, caused many of us to conform internally to what we thought she approved of.

The desire to please Pauline certainly colored my own work. As a beginner, I had no rhythm of my own, or none that I could use to review movies. (Lionel Trilling's exquisite hesitations and distinguished pathos would have wrapped the jagged surfaces of "M*A*S*H" in houndstooth tweed.) Now and then, I imitated Pauline's rhythms. I exploited the taunting rhetorical question; the piled-up syncopated adjectives ("Love Story," she wrote, is "a generation-gap variant of a neo-Victorian heart-wringer . . . written in a snappy, tear-jerking, hard-soft style"); the thumping-finger-in-the-chest use of "you"—you feel this, you feel that, you hate, you love. She was trying, as she explained, to get at common responses, but the effect was alternately to flatter and terrorize the reader into agreement. My imitation of these devices was not conscious; I was reaching for the security of an authoritative voice. Looking back, I can say that as a young man I may not have had enough of a writing self to violate—that is, I had yet to develop the sense of shame that would have checked the practice of imitation. As late as 1980, I was capable of writing (in *New York*), about De Palma's "Dressed to Kill," "You can see that he's using film techniques and tricks to get at unconscious fears and to extend the lyrical possibilities of violence, and you admire his sadistic virtuosity even as he's manipulating you unconscionably." I'll stand by the description of what De Palma was doing. What makes me wince now is that "you" were unlikely to "see" anything so damnably specific. The hectoring second person was an attempt to hog-tie an elusive emotion.

Though Pauline never said as much, word drifted back to me, two years or so after I started at *The Atlantic*, that she considered me an imitator. She did let me know, now and then, that she wasn't crazy about what I was writing, and she grew distant. Then the axe fell. In late 1972 or early 1973, I can't remember which, she called one afternoon with grim news: I had no talent for this trade. "You're too restless to be a writer," she said. And then she called again a few hours later: "I've thought about this seriously, honey. You should do something else with your energy." She suggested film producing.

In between the first call and the second, I felt a little weak and lay down on my bed. What to do now? There was a heaviness in my chest and a slight roaring in my ears, as if a wave had knocked me over and the waters were still swirling around my head. After a while, protest needled through the wash of despair. What *right*? What right did anyone have to speak this way? She pronounced her sentence on me as if she alone had the responsibility and the courage to rescue me from a disastrous misunderstanding of my own nature. But there was a market for writing, wasn't there?—a *market*, which offered its own palpable discouragement to the untalented. If she was right, the collective judgment of many people would let me know it.

"No," I said into the telephone when she called the second time. "I think you're wrong." But I said it weakly, and between the calls I had thought, Maybe she'll change her mind.

In the many years that followed, restraining my desire to reach for the telephone, I rarely spoke to Pauline, who was wary in general and blew hot and cold on the subject of my writing. I longed to get away from the subject, but she wanted only a power relationship with me, narrowing the channel of our conversation to the issue of her judgment of my work. The old friendliness would return now and then, but in person she could be rude and sometimes insulting. The implications of her manner were clear enough: I had been told, hadn't I? How odd that I persisted in this error of continuing to write. Those of my friends who were her friends as well dropped away in this period. When I ran into them, they stared at me, an apparent impostor, with a slight disdain—penned sheep, I told myself angrily, expelling an animal whose wool is not good enough to card.

For years, I carried on a dialogue with Pauline in my head about movies and life, conversations that would pop into consciousness while I was taking a shower, scrambling eggs, crossing the street. I suppose I hoped to will her into offering her friendship again, even though, at another level, I knew I was better off without it. What I wanted, after all, was not to be Pauline but to be myself. But, after she dismissed me, I never squared my shoulders and announced a newly discovered defiance. Like most people, I'm incapable of such dramatic gestures; instead, I put one foot in front of the other, preserving myself from nullity by refusing her assessment. I had made a false start, so in 1976 I restarted myself and gained traction in a good weekly paper, the Boston *Phoenix*, and began to remove the borrowed rhythms, line by line.

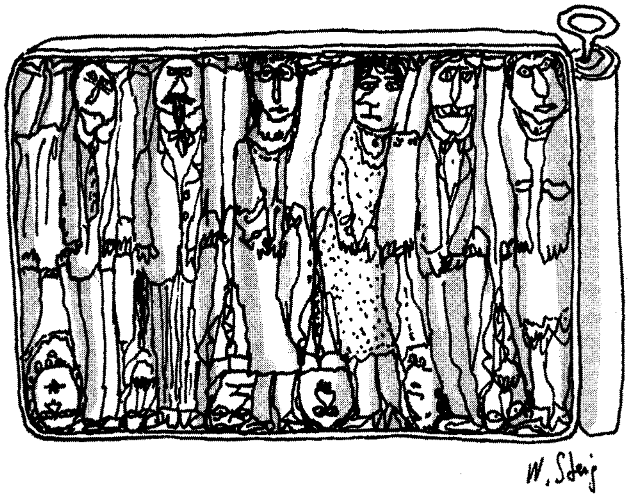
And, having been tossed out of Eden, I no longer suppressed what I had often suppressed in the past, my sense that there was something weak and half-dishonest on both sides of the master-disciple relationship. Everyone else, Pauline insisted, had *motives;* they operated out of unconscious drives, or they were corrupted by money or by love of power. But she had no interest in power; she was interested only in speaking the Truth. She would have committed seppuku in the lobby of the Algonquin before using such capital-letter words, but that was what she meant, and she would not accept even an occasional suggestion from her disciples that she liked pushing people around or had written untruly. I remembered that when the quickly forgotten movie version of "Fiddler on the Roof" came out, in 1971, and she wrote a long, nonsensical rave in which the clumsy picture was made a powerful portrait of the sources of the Broadway musical itself ("Though the techniques and simplifications are those of musical comedy, when they are put to work on a large emotional theme that is consonant with the very nature of musical comedy—is, in fact, at its heart—the effect on the large screen is that of a musical epic"), I used Yiddish to tell her that the piece was overblown ("How could you make such a *tsimmes* out of that thing?"), and she cursed and slammed down the phone.

I also remembered that back in 1970, after a screening at the old New Yorker Theatre, on upper Broadway, Pauline and I had an embarrassing lunch with the director Nicholas Ray in a Chinese restaurant across the street. In the sixties, the auteurist critics in France and America had taken up Ray, who had made "They Live by Night," "In a Lonely Place," "Johnny Guitar," "Rebel Without a Cause," and other films. In these celebrations, Ray was the haunted poet of the cinema; later on, the young German director Wim Wenders put Ray in a couple of his movies, drawing on his glamorous mystique. A former actor, Ray was tall and gaunt, with an enormous pile of white hair, a patch over one eye, and a guttural voice. Though only in his late fifties, Ray was ill; he was clearly finished as a Hollywood director, and yet Pauline, vexed by his recent critical deification, went through his films one by one—this movie twenty years earlier had a few good shots, another one had been overpraised, a third was terrible, and so on—and Ray, his face cast down into his shrimp and rice, said hardly a word. What digs at me now is that I said nothing myself. I knew perfectly well that the act of telling off Ray was cruelly unnecessary, even though Pauline, doing her missionary work, probably couldn't have been stopped.

Sigmund Freud, after adopting a series of younger analysts as heirs, dismissed many of them. But those analysts, men like Wilhelm Stekel and Carl Jung, had no desire to displace Freud or even to challenge his intellect; they wanted his love and some tolerance of disagreement. There's a big difference, of course, between film critics and the founders of psychoanalysis, but many such relationships seem to take a similar shape. There may be a split between what the rejected disciple wants and what he needs. He remains hungry for approval, and that hunger is often humiliating to his developing pride. But what he gets is in fact what he needs—contempt and opposition, against which he defines himself, growing up at last.

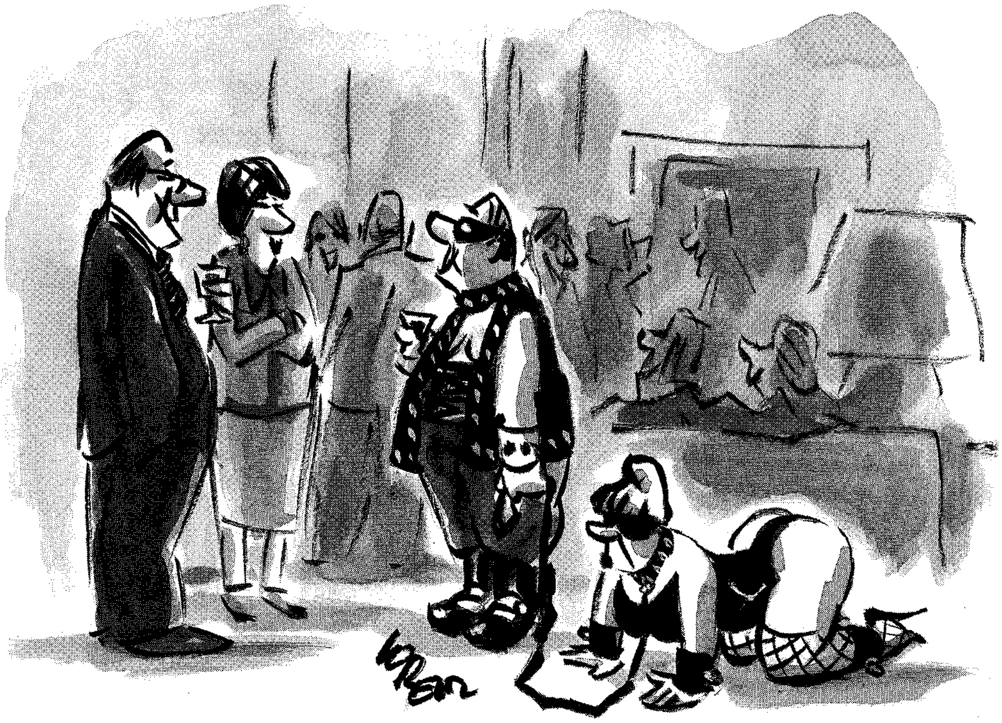
When I finally committed mutiny, I was initially unaware that I had done so. Pauline had always insisted that a work of art could be rough, noisy, childish even. Her protest against classy surfaces and formalism was enormously influential on an entire generation of critics who have celebrated every vestige of energy in American pop for the past thirty-five years. But by the eighties the notion that pop could be subversive was beginning to look a little tattered. The conglomerates were tightening their grip on the studios, and the period of lawless creativity which had produced such masterpieces as the "Godfather" movies and "Taxi Driver" and "Chinatown" was clearly over. In the end, Pauline was reduced to looking for subversion in more and more trivial movies. Her old revolt against highbrow orthodoxy had turned into a new pop orthodoxy of her own—"crazy" became her highest term of praise. At the same time, she was too hard on the "bourgeois worldliness" of a quiet director like Eric Rohmer, and she virtually lost interest in movies from abroad, ignoring the nasty but provocative Rainer Werner Fassbinder, attacking Wim Wenders's and Werner Herzog's rarefied movies as a threat to her all-American vitality. Of Herzog: "His goodness saps our strength." Of Wenders's "Wings of Desire": "It's enough to make moviegoers feel impotent."

In "I Lost It at the Movies," Pauline wrote, "In this country, respect for High Culture is becoming a ritual," and throughout her career she campaigned against "schoolroom" notions of art. By the late eighties, however, the kind of deep-dish European "art films" she had ridiculed had virtually disappeared, the schoolroom was rapidly losing its authority, and the new ritual in this country was not respect for high culture but contempt for it. In the universities, some of the more ambitious younger faculty and graduate students were beginning to mount the canting ideological attack on dead white males. If the Western classics enraged so many



WILLIAM STEIG, 1/23/89

people, I thought, maybe there was something subversive about *them*, and I wound up writing a long, celebratory book about the experience of rereading, at the age of forty-eight, the core-curriculum courses at Columbia. Until the book was done, however, I never realized that by getting away for a while from pop—which had become omnivorous, threatening to swallow the entire culture—I was struggling to throw off a personal influence that no longer fit.



"So, what are you two up to these days?"

Well, let it go, let it go at last. If growing up is partly a matter of building strength atop disappointments, I can't blame Pauline for not giving me the praise that I wanted. She was an astonishing woman who enhanced my life, and many other people's lives. In 1970, I sat with her in the rear of a theatre showing the prissy costume epic "Cromwell." Richard Harris, dressed in barrel bloomers as Cromwell, stamped his foot angrily, and Pauline, in mock sympathy, cried, "Oh, *drat*," convulsing the back third of the house. A couple of years later, at the time of "Deep Throat," she wanted to know what the porn craze was about, and demanded that I take her to a theatre on the then lewdly outfitted Seventh Avenue. She was the only woman in the room. Onscreen, one of the studs melted for an instant and Pauline let out a loud, disappointed "Awww." Men in black raincoats sitting nearby rustled in their seats. After a few minutes, two rounded bottoms appeared, juxtaposed one on top of the other, and Pauline said, "That's sort of sweet." The raincoats turned and glared angrily in our direction; some of them stalked out. Pauline responded to everything, redeeming a furtive experience by bringing it into the realm of regular moviegoing—by turning it into fun.

At her best, she was a mistress of revels, and we longed to dance and swagger as nimbly as she did. In retrospect, I see nothing so terrible about a group of critics speaking as a single voice at a breakout time in the arts. During the twenties, and afterward, Carl Van Vechten and the philosopher-critic Alain Locke and groups of young disciples promoted what became known as the Harlem Renaissance. In the late forties and early fifties, the thuggish but brilliant Clement Greenberg gathered a cadre of critics around him and helped the Abstract Expressionist painters find their audience and their buyers. Art movements attract ardent critical supporters who want desperately to be part of history. In the seventies, Pauline and her group were not the only ones pushing Scorsese, Coppola, Altman, Spielberg, and the rest, but we did it early, and we helped a group of directors make their way.

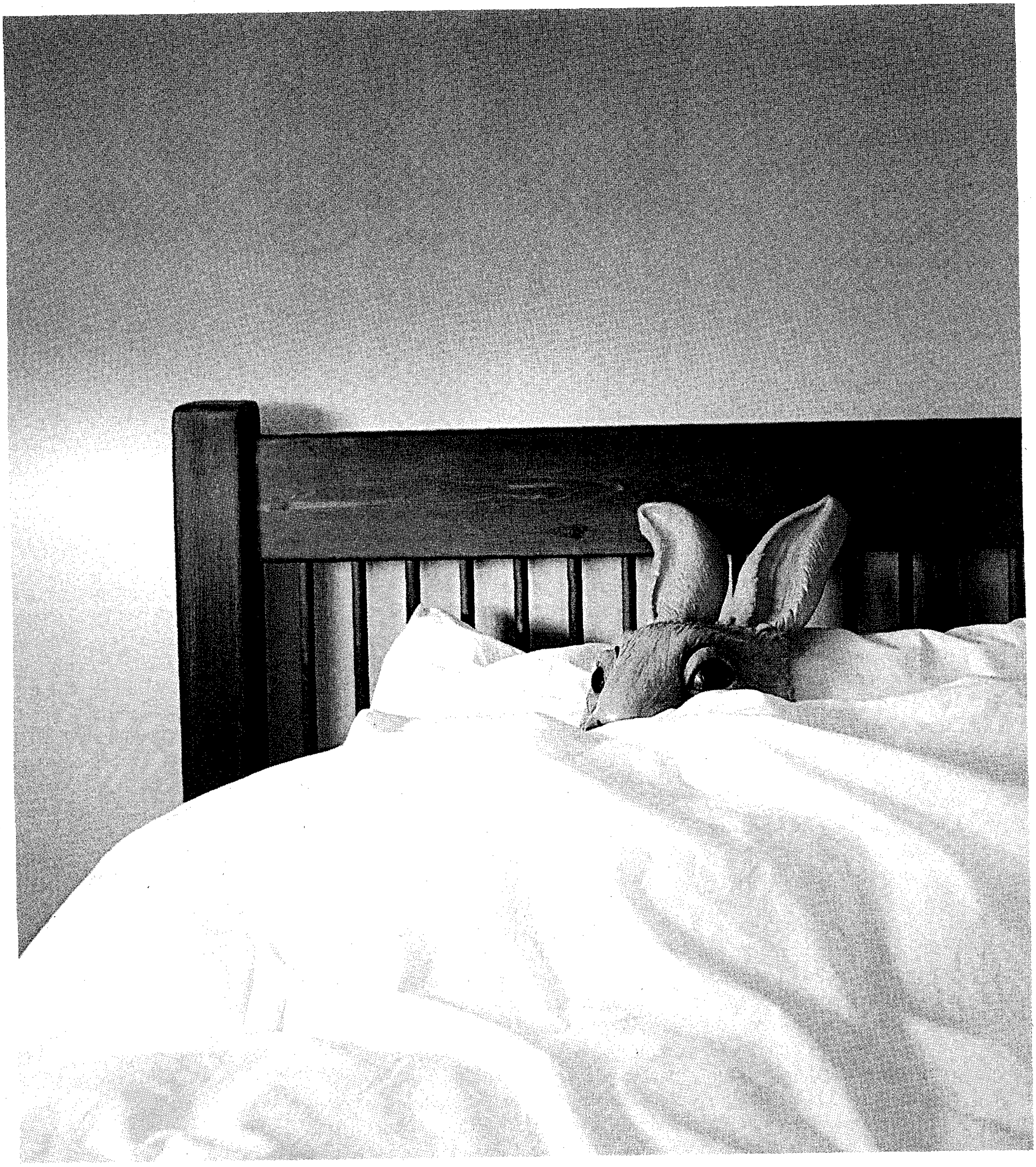
In movie criticism, Pauline is unlikely to have a successor. It is not a matter simply of talent. There's plenty of critical talent around, in part because of her example. But the movie culture has changed, and movie criticism with it. Movies have become a major business story, but, for long stretches of the year, a minor artistic story, and without heroic movies we are not likely to have heroic critics. Could the situation become more healthy? If American culture, under pressure of war and disgust for lying corporate and political leaders, should reach a crisis again, American movies could come alive once more as an art form, and the critics would claim their small but necessary piece of the action. Pauline Kael's influence may lie as much in the future as in the past.

She retired in 1991, and in the years before her death, on September 3, 2001, I saw her only once—at her eightieth-birthday party, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1999, a large, noisy gathering of family, friends, disciples, and ex-disciples. She had been ill for a long time, and she had become tiny and frail, a grandmother more than a mother. I wanted to speak to her, I tried twice, but even though she had invited me to the party she was silent when I came around. "In both abundance and quality," I wrote in an obituary published in this magazine, two years later, her work "was a performance very likely without equal in the history of American journalism." Those seemed the right words, and it felt good to write them. And I laughed when, the day after I finished the piece, late at night, as I was falling asleep, a small voice deep inside me said, "I wonder if Pauline liked that obit?" ♦

FICTION

POND, WITH MUD

BY DONALD ANTRIM



"The yellow bird made from cloth and / vines sits better in the / window than / the red truck I built last / year of / bottles," Patrick Rouse wrote, in the fifteenth volume of what he liked to refer to as his life's work—in reality, a journal crammed with passages written in a metaphorized terminology that Patrick had borrowed, or so he told himself, from the Imagist poets, and which he used to describe his emotions and whatever objects aroused his emotions. The "yellow bird," for instance, referred to a lingerie bikini set featuring yellow lace woven in a tropical-jungle motif, which he had purchased a few days before for his fiancée, Caroline, who, at that moment, was standing in the living room modelling it for Patrick and—though the boy could hardly appreciate the significance of his mother's erotic poses in bare feet before the hearth . . . or *could* he?—for her son, the "three-eyed rabbit." That being, of course, more of Patrick's code, or poetry, in this case describing Gregory, Caroline's five-year-old from her marriage to Roger, an unemployed chamber musician.

"You like it?" Caroline asked Patrick.

He did. He did like it! He said, "That's a good color for you."

Caroline turned and peered over her shoulder, as if into a mirror hung on the wall. There was no mirror. She drank from her wine, and said, "It *is* a good color, isn't it? I wouldn't have picked it, because it's bright. But you spotted it! You had the wisdom to see it." She took another sip.

"Not wisdom," Patrick said, as he wrote, in scratchy blue letters on a blank page in the book open on his lap, "Fat airplanes spot cloudless skies / their propellers / soft fans humming / leaking," which was effectively a reminder to himself that soon he would be taking off his clothes, getting into bed, pushing aside the blue coverlet, climbing atop Caroline, and fucking.

"You always know what colors I can wear."

"All I need to figure that out is a peek in the closet."

At that point Gregory, who was sitting in the enormous Mission-style chair beneath the framed photograph of Caroline on vacation, waving from the bow of the U.S.S. Wisconsin—Gregory made one of his demands.

JOE MADEIRA/PHOTONICA

"Other! Chair!"

"Do you want to get him?" Patrick said.

"You get him. I've got these new things on."

What was difficult was not moving the boy from one chair to another, exactly; the problem consisted in the likelihood that, once moved, Gregory might become sad. It was grotesque, Patrick thought, always to be hoisting this growing boy, who could, after all, walk. Why did they do it, he and Caroline? Why did they take orders from Gregory? There was nothing wrong with him—at least, nothing Dr. Percy could ever find.

"Here I come, my young boy who is not my own," Patrick said. It was one of his jokes. He closed the volume on his lap, and capped his pen, an ostentatious black-and-red lacquered fountain pen that he had bought for himself as a gift, and which leaked while he wrote. As always, he checked his hands, his shirt, and the front of his pants around the zipper. He found no ink smears. It had been a good writing day.

It frequently happened, when Patrick stopped purposefully making notes in "Pond, with Mud" (his secret name for his encrypted journal), that he began to feel as if he might be on the verge of formulating a concrete idea about the nature of existence, and about his place in the scheme of things. It was a feeling that came, as he thought of it, from deep in his heart. But each time he got this feeling it almost instantly went away. Would he never know what it was that he was trying to think about himself?

He forced himself to concentrate on Gregory. The boy was spread, neither sitting nor lying—Gregory was doing a perverse version of both at once—across the leather seat cushion of the big Stickley that Patrick had carted with him everywhere he'd lived since college. The chair was coming apart in places. Something structural somewhere had broken, and one leg had a tendency to work its way gradually loose from the frame. Every now and then, the leg had to be slapped back into position. Patrick had seduced Amy in this chair. Then Vanessa. Then Caroline.

He said to the sprawling boy, "Funny Bunny, I'm going to do something for you that you are going to like."

"Don't get him excited," Caroline said. She placed her wineglass on the mantel. She did a slow, balletic turn, showing Patrick her body. And Patrick knew—her voice had that angry sound—that the wine had begun to take hold.

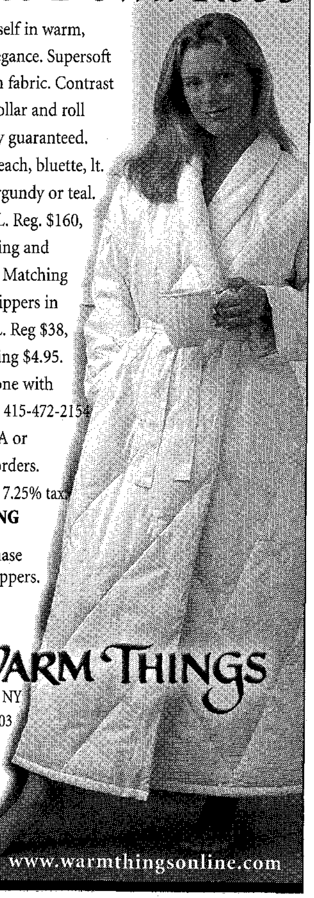
He approached the boy. He leaned over and placed his hands under Gregory's arms. He began to lift. He said, "Do you love it when I hold you in the air? Are you *my* Bunny?"

In fact, the approval Patrick cared for was Caroline's. Patrick craved recognition from her, in order to view himself favorably as a man who could function as a father. This had become especially meaningful to him after what had happened a few days before.

He had taken the afternoon off from his job at the printing press and gone with the boy in tow to catch the two-o'clock train to the zoo that had recently opened on the outskirts of town, on marshlands that had been home to a chemical-solvent extraction plant that had burned to the ground. Immediately following the zoo's inaugural ribbon-cutting ceremony—or relatively soon after, to be more precise—strange things had begun to happen to the more esoteric wild animals. Why was it that the rare and endangered species, the ones you'd never heard of, all seemed to have compromised immune systems? At any rate, it had been reported in the papers that the board of governors and the director of the zoo were soon to come under indictment for cruelty to animals and for various misappropriations of municipal funds. The zoo's future was in question. The time for a visit was now.

"Here we go!" Patrick had exclaimed to Gregory as, with the boy's damp hand grasped in his fist, the two of them made their way awkwardly through one of the angling, cavernous passageways leading from the street to the elevated central lobby of the city's restored Art Deco train terminal. Patrick was in the habit of carrying along, wherever he went, the current volume of "Pond, with Mud." Here, with a view ahead toward the train station's towering and heavily leaded windows, windows that allowed

Goose Down Robe



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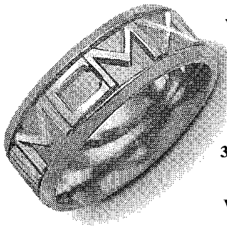

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ray after ray of sunlight to spill into the station's airy middle spaces, illuminating floating dust motes and giving the whole marble place the steamy, mystical aura of a site associated with feelings and moods that were, for want of a better word, spiritual (the spirit of progress? This, to Patrick, had the feel of a *theme*), even otherworldly—here in the train station, Patrick felt inspired to say to the boy, whose hand he now shook loose, "Hang on a minute, Bunny."

He took his pen from the inside pocket of his coat. He unscrewed the brass-and-lacquer cap. What he loved most about untwisting the cap was the care required to keep the ink from running. Rituals were important. For instance, Patrick always carried the journal tucked at a certain angle beneath his left arm, pressed close to his heart, in the manner, he fantasized, of some boyish scholar traipsing with a rare edition of Donne through an English library hung with tapestries. Now he opened the volume and found a clean page. He gazed up at the tile mosaics of women's faces adorning the lintels above the station windows. As he wrote, Patrick whispered to himself, in cadence with the travellers' footsteps echoing along the entryway to the great hall, "Beasts or angels / arcing / entwined though dead among / cloud forms / invisible."

"We! Go!" Gregory shouted, badly interrupting Patrick, who looked rapidly left to right, and up and down, saying, "What? What? Of course, Gregory. We're going to the zoo to see the deformed animals."

Patrick had one of his upsetting everyday thoughts: Christ, I'm not much of a poet, am I? He pushed this question out of his mind.

In a soft voice, and in tones meant to be conciliatory, he said to Gregory, "Hey, little man, you don't have to scream."

It was too late. The boy was crying. Patrick shut the book, and felt dismay. He had forgotten to blow the ink dry, and the page would smudge. It would be a bad writing day.

"Shit," he said to Caroline's son, bawling in the middle of the crowded station concourse. Carefully Patrick capped and returned the pen to the interior pocket of his jacket. He produced a wad of the loose tissues he always carried in his coat pockets for these routine weeping sessions. He knelt and pushed the soft white paper toward the boy's face. What had made him think that he could ever deal with a kid?

In fact, he *was* dealing with a kid, and not doing nearly as bad a job as he worried others might suppose, were any of those people rushing by—on their way to trains or jobs—to stop and watch as he wiped the tears and the snot from Gregory's cheeks and the rashy area around his mouth.

"There, it's all right. Come on. Don't you want to see the goiters on the chimpanzees?"

"The! What?"

"Where in the world did you learn to talk, anyway?" Patrick asked. This question came out sweetly. He said, "We're a pair, aren't we?" and finished wiping the boy's face. Gregory had such clear eyes. They were not at all bloodshot, even after sobbing.

Patrick deposited the wet tissues back in a coat pocket to dry for the next squall. From another pocket he fished a child-size bottle of juice and a miniature straw. He shook the bottle, opened it, planted the straw in the juice, and held bottle and straw for Gregory to drink. The bottle was quite small; Patrick's hand closed around it. Were you to have seen the two of them, the man kneeling before the boy, the boy sucking on the almost invisible plastic straw, you might have imagined that the boy was drinking from the man's hand.

"Ready?" Patrick asked.

"Juice!" Gregory exclaimed, and, just like that, he was done drinking, and everything returned to normal.

Patrick removed the wet straw from the juice. He capped the bottle and put it back in his pocket for later. No trash can was in sight, so he replaced the straw in the jacket pocket already stuffed with the bottle and the used tissues. Looking over the top of Gregory's head, he saw, across the terminal crowded with people indistinctly coming and going, a young man and woman holding hands and running, though not in the manner of people hurrying to board a train. The girl seemed to be skipping, or dancing. Her skirt flew up around her legs. Was there music playing in her head? Was she maybe wearing headphones?

Patrick took Gregory's hand in his. He said, with equal measures of sarcasm and earnestness, "Shall we dance?"

It was at this moment that a musician who had set up near the door to the street—the door through which Patrick and Gregory had entered the station—began playing a violin. The musician was situated directly behind Patrick, who, for one narcissistic moment, believed that the music in the tunnel was a reverberant production of his own imagination. Then, peering down at Gregory, he saw that Gregory was peeking around his, Patrick's, legs. Gregory was *seeing* the man playing the violin. Patrick turned, and saw that the violinist was Roger, Gregory's father, the man Caroline had been married to when Patrick had come on the scene.

"Roger! Hey, Roger!" Patrick called down the corridor. It was an act of impulsiveness and guilt. Patrick heard his own voice echoing, decaying, and dying against the richer, seductive sounds of the music. The musician—yes, it was Caroline's former husband—was wearing a green coat that looked frayed and unclean. God only knew what he might have been carrying in the pockets of that coat. It appeared that Roger had continued to be what he had been in the old days: a poor, alcoholic artist.

"Look, Bunny," Patrick said to the top of Gregory's head. "Do you know who that man is?"

"Daddy."

"Right you are. Daddy. The pea-green boat with torn sails. Someone should haul her out to sea."

What was he saying? What was he *doing*? Why had he called out? Had the violinist heard? Had Roger seen Gregory spying from behind Patrick's legs? Patrick flipped open "Pond, with Mud," got out his pen, went through the ritual of delicately removing the cap, and scribbled (after searching for an unsmudged page) a few lighthearted, comical-nautical associations. "Pea-green / boat / towed / in shreds / out." This time he remembered to blow on the ink.

And it was still possible, he thought, that Roger had neither seen nor heard them, that he and the boy might slip away and take refuge on a train-platform bench, before setting out on their journey to the contaminated zoo. He had taken the afternoon off for this. They really ought to make it to the zoo.

He watched the violinist, who was swaying above the hips in that enchantedly theatrical fashion in which string players expectably do—as if blowing in the intermittent wind on which all music travels. And travellers, actual ones, entering and departing through the colossal wooden doors onto the street, altered their courses, automatically tacking around Roger and his empty music case left open on the ground for small bills and change. Patrick watched the bow rising and falling, pulled by the violinist's hand across the instrument's strings. He had the impression that the musician was rocking himself to sleep. The music rolled up the tunnel. Because the corridor walls and the ceiling were tiled, the notes came on amplified, and certain passages sounded both muddled and complexly dynamic, orchestral.

It was Brahms. No, it wasn't. It was Sibelius. No, it was Robert Schumann. It was not Mendelssohn—that much was evident, even to Patrick. And it was not, on second thought, Schumann. It was Brahms. Roger had had a thing for Brahms.

Roger was looking at them now, peering along the narrow length of his violin's neck, and out along the hundred feet of windowless tunnel that separated him from Patrick and Gregory. Even at this distance, Patrick, gazing back down the dirty white corridor, could see where Gregory had come by his big damp eyes.

Patrick and the three-eyed rabbit stood watching Roger watch them. Now and then, people wearing backpacks, or maneuvering wheeled suitcases, came between them. The oncoming people pressed down on Patrick and the boy, and Gregory wrapped his arms around Patrick's leg. What was interesting about this moment was the way in which Roger's playing produced an occasion for what felt to Patrick like a bond between the men—it was music for male affinity, for courtship, for sharing—and, furthermore, between the men and the boy. Would Roger understand this? Gregory's real parents, that early afternoon before the trip to visit the dying animals, were not Roger and Caroline, or even Patrick and Caroline, but Patrick and Roger.

"I guess we ought to say hello," Patrick said to Gregory. "Come on, Bunny, let go of my leg."

"Can't!"

"Yes, you can. Knock it off." He had to reach down and pull the boy off him. He anticipated tears, but in fact he was the one who felt like crying. This feeling came on suddenly. He said, "I'm going to pick you up. You'll be safe and happy in the air! Are you ready to be happy?"

"Up!"

"Good boy. Let's say hi to your daddy, and after that we'll ride out to the zoo and see something tragic."

Was he crazy? They'd never make their train this way. He knelt before the boy. Patrick held the journal in one hand. Now he reached behind Gregory, pressing the journal between his arm and Gregory's back. His other hand went beneath Gregory's arm. He got a grip on Gregory. He stood and

"Do you have a reservation?"

WILLIAM STEIG, 3/31/86

brought the boy close to him, squeezing him with "Pond, with Mud." He would have preferred to avoid carrying Gregory. Once up, the kid would be unwilling to go down. And lately he'd got heavy. The boy was all muscle and snot. How would Patrick carry him all day long?

If only Caroline had been with them. On the other hand, though, maybe not. In truth, it occurred to him, he didn't want Caroline there at all.

"Wait a minute, hold on, wait a minute," he said to the Funny Bunny. There was something Patrick had to get down in the work-in-progress, before he forgot. It was about Caroline. He pictured her dressed for the office, with her scarf knotted over the buttoned top button of her starched white shirt, noosing her neck. Why had Patrick never before considered that knotted scarf in relation to the death of love? The scarf produced such obvious imagery. Obvious? Not *too* obvious.

What to do? How to get words down on paper? If he lowered the Bunny to the ground, there could be a tantrum and the day would be ruined. On the other hand, were he to try to open the book and take out the pen—well, forget it, it was out of the question. Could he persuade Gregory to climb up and ride on his shoulders, and in this way free his hands? But he wouldn't have free hands, would he? He'd be holding Gregory's knees, restraining Gregory from kicking him in the chest with the heels of his little rubber sneakers.

He carried Gregory down the tiled hall, against the rush of people entering from the street. He felt afraid. Why, all of a sudden, was he so full of fear? He knew the answer. It was simple. He wasn't making his art. No, that wasn't the complete answer. The complete answer was that he was not an artist. He was a person who let language dissolve into nothingness. Did that qualify as an insight?

Walking along the train-station tunnel, the boy cradled in his arms, he felt as if he were pushing through music—as if the music from the violin had become resistant, like a substance.

"Hello!" Patrick said too loudly to the violinist. "Brahms!" he exclaimed. Why was he talking like the boy? What an idiot he was. He'd become submissive. The only way he could make things worse would be to pull dollar bills from his pocket and toss them into the violin case.

THE TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

Because few here recall the old wars,
The burning of Atlanta and Dresden,
The great-uncle who lies in Arlington,
Or that Vietnam vet on crutches
Who tried to bum a dime or a cigarette.

The lake is still in the early morning light.
The road winds, I slow down to let
A small, furry animal cross in a hurry.
The few remaining wisps of fog
Are like smoke rising out of cannons.

In one little town flags fly over dark houses.
Outside a church made of gray stone
The statue of the Virgin blesses the day.
Her son is inside afraid to light a candle,
Saying, Forgive one another, clothe the naked.

Niobe and her children may live here.
As for me, I don't know where I am—
And here I'm already leaving in a hurry
Down a stretch with nothing to see,
Dark woods everywhere closing in on me.

—*Charles Simic*

With one arm, he held Gregory. He dug deeply into his pants pocket. Money and old tissues were wadded in a ball in Patrick's pocket. He brought out a handful. There was no way for him to count the money. He held it up before his eyes. Twenties and fives.

"Gregory and I were on our way to the zoo! I took the day off. We thought we could maybe see a few wild animals before they have to quarantine them. That's a joke. I guess it's not funny." And he said, "Right, Gregory? The zoo! Gregory, say hello to your father." And with that he let a few bills flutter from his hand to the case on the ground. It was probably thirty or forty dollars.

Could anything have been meaner? Could he have been more cruel? Here was a demonstration of the power of a weak man over a weaker man. And there was more to come, when he shoved the money and the tissues back into his pocket, and said, "Can I buy you a drink?" Patrick understood that he was not so much abusing the other man as punishing himself; they would drink together, the two men, and Patrick would buy, and he would get drunk enough to give himself credit for being a generous person. Later in the day, Roger might get up his nerve and punch him; but if he did he might injure his hand and be unable to play the violin for a while, and Patrick would be obliged to help him with a loan. There was no end to it.

"Drink?" the violinist said. Immediately he stopped playing and knelt to stow away his violin. He took care securing it in the case, but was speedy nonetheless. He needs a drink, Patrick thought. Patrick felt misgivings as he watched the violin-case lid come down over money that had recently been his. Roger snapped the case shut and stood up, and, a moment later, Gregory and his two fathers set out to waste the day sitting on stools in a dark train-station bar, a place off to the side, away from the sunlight, and populated with men who leaned down hard and unspeaking over their glasses.

There was no music in the bar. The place looked to Patrick as if it had been neglected by the architects who had recently completed the renovation of the train station. Had they forgotten about it? It had a linoleum floor, and, in keeping with the historical standards for furnishings in these sorts of haunts, red vinyl booths, and walls painted a dark shade down low, toward the floor, and a lighter color up above. The ceiling was yellowing; certainly in another age, the seventies most likely, it had been white. All those burning cigarettes. All those people coughing themselves to death. Patrick imagined the dark bar full of coughers. There was something about the smell in the place, too. It smelled to Patrick like a hospital, or, faintly, like Roger, except saltier. This bar off to the side of the concourse was all that was left of the old train station; it reminded Patrick of the periods in modern literature when a decline in civilization is evident in the works of the poets. But when he thought about this he could not dream up any original lines that did not refer to cigarettes, or to the fact that lit cigarettes held in the air by drunks in dark rooms become little galaxies, spiralling.

Roger threw his violin case on the bar. This was a powerful move on his part. It showed that he had confidence in what he trusted (the hard case) to protect what he needed (the fragile violin) in order to maintain for himself some small place in which he could be a—what? A man in the world.

Patrick settled Gregory on a stool. Then, in an imitation of Roger's confidence, he threw "Pond, with Mud" on the bar. This was a cavalier and companionable gesture. There would be time later to compose formal impressions regarding the experience of chucking his literary work around. In the meantime, he felt in his coat pocket for the fountain pen. There it was, clipped to the pocket's lining.

The bartender came over. Roger asked for a beer.

"Sure thing, Roger," the bartender said to him. "How's it going today?"

"Money!"

"Good for you."

This short conversation emboldened Patrick to order a drink suitable for the occasion. What *was* the occasion? And never mind that Scotch had been his father's drink. In memory, Patrick could see the old man with a drink in his hand, inhaling from his cigarette in the night. Frankly, there came a point in each and every day when Patrick saw this image of his father.

"May I have a Scotch-and-soda?"

"Anything for the little guy?" the bartender asked, and, for a moment, Patrick was not sure what the man was talking about. He thought the bartender was referring to him—to Patrick. Little guy? Patrick caught on and said, "I'm carrying juice."

He hauled the juice out of his coat pocket. He shook the bottle. He reached back into his pocket, got the miniature straw, and wiped it with a bar napkin. While wiping, he said, "Roger, I like your playing." Where were those drinks? Patrick looked at Gregory and said, "How are you doing on that stool, Bunny? Comfortable? We can move over to a booth as soon as one opens up. Please don't cry."

"Bunny?" This from Roger.

"We call him that. Actually, we don't call him that. I call him that. Right, Bunny? Are you my Funny Bunny?" Patrick had the juice ready. He held the bottle for Gregory to drink. Gregory, somehow managing to keep his balance on the elevated bar stool, leaned over between the two men, took the straw expertly in his mouth, and, with his hair falling forward over his ears, hiding his face, began to suck.

Patrick said, "Yeah, good boy."

"Yeah! Boy," Roger exclaimed. Who was submissive now?

The drinks came, and Patrick put his money on the bar. Roger got his beer, and Patrick his Scotch; Gregory worked on his miniature juice; the three of them drank together. It was a moment of harmony produced—in that cosmic darkness that made the forlorn station bar a place apart from the world—by alcohol, the absence of women, and, Patrick thought, love.

"Shall we have another?" he asked.

"Another," Roger answered.

"Here's to being here," Patrick said, hoisting his glass; and he had the feeling, as he made this toast, that there were all manner of things he wanted to

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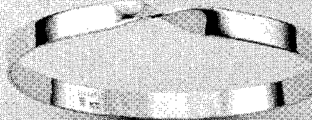

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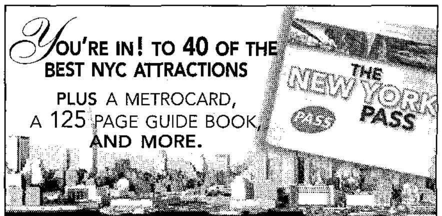

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say (and had for some time *needed* to say, now that he thought about it) to Roger. For instance, Patrick suddenly couldn't wait to assure Roger that he and Caroline had been very upset when they'd discovered that he had lost his job teaching at the conservatory. But how to say this in words that would not be hurtful to the man's pride? Also, was it a good idea for Patrick to let the deposed husband know that Caroline still cared for him? Was it wise for Patrick to mention Caroline at all? He felt himself on the verge of telling Roger that he was sure that he, Patrick, might be able to persuade Caroline to overlook a few of those child-custody legalities. Bury the axe. No one ever need raise his arm and strike anyone in anger again. Roger could drop by Patrick and Caroline's apartment, have a beer or a glass of wine, play a lullaby on his fiddle, and hold his son for a few minutes. Roger didn't look like a person who wanted to hurt a little boy. Did he?

It wasn't Patrick's place to make promises to Roger. It wasn't his place to say anything to Roger.

Nonetheless he said, "Do you want to hold him?"

Patrick drank from his drink. In that instant, he felt at peace with himself—he could understand drinking. Caroline did not like Patrick to drink. Correction: Caroline didn't like him to drink *too much*. It occurred to him then that the anniversary of their engagement was coming up in three days. Jesus! He had to think about a present.

The train-station bar was emptying. Patrick supposed that the men in the bar were leaving to catch trains to the suburbs. Either that or heading back to their jobs. Every now and then, the door to the bar would open, and light would flood in, briefly. The person leaving might stand silhouetted in this bright light, waving a hand at the drinkers left behind.

"So long. See you tomorrow," the bartender called toward the door as it closed. The light disappeared, and the bartender brought Patrick and Roger one beer and one Scotch. He counted out money from the pile in front of Patrick. The money was wet, and there was tissue paper mixed with it.

"Do you want to hold him?" Patrick asked Roger again. "It's all right if you don't feel like it."

"No," Roger said to him.

"No? You don't? Or you do? Want to hold the Bunny?"

The bartender came back carrying change. He put the change on the bar. "Will you be wanting anything for your little boy? Will you be wanting a glass of milk?"

Was the bartender addressing Patrick? Or Roger? Gregory had stopped drinking from the juice bottle and was leaning over against the rounded edge of the bar, his head pillowed on arms crossed beneath him, in the manner, and with the posture, of a child slumbering at a school desk. His eyes were closed. The juice was empty.

"He's doing fine, we're all fine, we're great, thank you," Patrick said. Patrick was drunk. Being drunk, he wondered why he was not more often drunk. Was that right? Grammatically speaking? Not more often drunk?

"You let me know," the bartender said.

To Roger, Patrick said, "Gregory is tired. We should let him rest a minute. You can hold him later."

Gregory's real father had already finished his beer, Patrick noticed. How many did that make? In all? As for Patrick, he was not, when he spoke, slurring his words, though he feared he might slur his words, were he not careful not to. Something like that. Between the two men, the boy slept. These two grown men gazed at each other, through the dark, across the boy; and Patrick found himself wondering how old Roger was. Caroline had told him, but he couldn't remember. In Roger's eyes, Patrick saw the boy's eyes. Roger's face might or might not have been a predictor of the face Gregory would one day show to the world. Roger was unshaven, with hair growing down his neck, past the top of his shirt collar, which was unbuttoned to the third button, and lay open beneath the pea-green coat that needed cleaning, and which was either too large or too small for Roger—it was hard for Patrick to say which. The effect was tacky. No, "tacky" wasn't the right word. Roger's chest was white and skinny, the chest of a man who'd begun drinking before he was a man. And the tip of his nose was red—a red nose! Like Gregory, Roger had a rashy mouth. Whiskers went this way and that. His hair looked lifeless.

He could play the violin, though. Boy, could he! That was a hell of a lot more than Patrick could do!

Was it time yet to relocate from the bar to a booth? The bar stools weren't the most comfortable things.

"Bartender!" Patrick called. "Hit us!" And to Roger he said, "This is going to have to be it. I'm about out of cash."

The men looked sadly at the money. It was true, there wasn't much left. Would Roger offer to spend the money that Patrick had dropped in his case? It was not likely.

And, hey, where was "Pond, with Mud"? Had the bartender taken it and stashed it behind the bar? Had one of the miserable drunks walked off with it? No, there it was, next to the violin. It was safe.

To Roger, Patrick said, "You've hardly said a word all night. All day. My friend. Tell me something. I've told you things. I've told you that Bunny and I are on our way to the zoo. I've told you we were going to look at all the crazy animals. I've told you that you can hold your son. I want you

Confession of Love

WILLIAM STEIG, 12/17/84

to tell me something I can write down. Tell *me* something, fucker," he said to Roger, and immediately regretted this. "I'm sorry. I am sorry."

"Don't," the other man said.

Don't? Don't what? Don't be sorry? Don't say these things? Don't apologize? Don't ask Roger to apologize?

Roger placed his hand on Gregory's back. He moved his hand gently, stroking the boy. As Patrick watched this, it came into his mind to say, "Don't wake him." Another "don't." Was that what Roger had meant? Don't ask me not to touch my son?

"Gregory." Roger said his son's name. "Gregory."

The boy's face was wrinkled from lying against his arms and the edge of the bar. He was coming awake. How long had he been sleeping? What was the time? How could there be a bar without a clock?

Patrick removed his malfunctioning pen from his pocket. But by the time he'd got the pen out he'd forgotten his subject. His subject had been? What were his subjects? Patrick's subjects were the usual subjects. There was another of his unfunny jokes. Patrick's subject had been time. But he'd forgotten time. Why was he holding his pen? He put it away. Was it leaking? No, that wetness Patrick felt was water dripping on him from the bottom of his glass. How much had he drunk? Or maybe the wetness was a spot of ink soaking through the lining of his coat, staining his shirt above his heart.

And Patrick, unwilling or unable to allow himself to be vanquished by Roger, said, sharply, "Hey, everybody, I'm bleeding to death!"

That did it. That brought on the tempest. Could anything have hurt Patrick more than to hear the boy cry out at the sound of his, Patrick's, voice?

"No crying, Bunny. O.K., no crying? No need to cry. I'm going to pick you up! You'll be happy in the air! Are you ready to be happy?"

He looked across at Gregory's father. One last look before leaving. He believed he knew in that instant what he saw in Roger's eyes.

And with that he leaned close to Gregory, picked up the Scotch-and-soda from the bar, raised the glass to the boy's lips, and said, "Here. Don't cry." ♦

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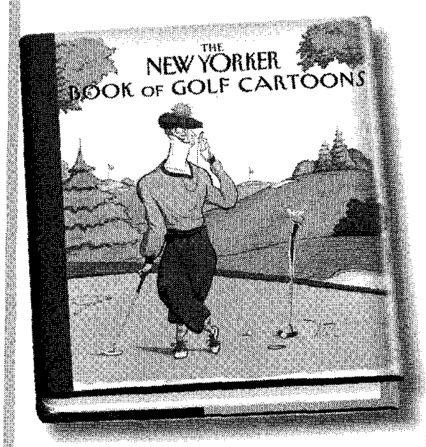
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THE CRITICS

WILLIAM STEIG, 11/2/87

A CRITIC AT LARGE

AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Bernardo Bertolucci revisits Paris.

BY LOUIS MENAND

The Langlois Affair began on February 9, 1968. That was the day when Henri Langlois, the director of the Cinémathèque Française, which he had established, in the mid-thirties, with his friend Georges Franju, and dedicated to preserving and exhibiting movies from all periods and countries, was relieved of his position and replaced by a man named Pierre Barbin. Barbin was an obscure and relatively inexperienced film-festival organizer, and Langlois was a culture hero, a status recognized even by his adversaries. One of the men who engineered his dismissal, Pierre Moinot, called him "a ragpicker of genius." Langlois was also, as it turned out, a fox, and his confrontation with French officialdom is one of the great stories of a year whose meaning, like the meaning of 1789 and the meaning of 1848 and, someday, probably, the meaning of 2001, is a forever deepening mystery, even for—especially for—the people who lived through it.

Pierre Moinot's description was not unjust. Film stock is famously perishable, and for many years movies were considered, even by the companies that made them, disposable commodities. Langlois saved movies from death and disintegration, not just the rags of cinema but the riches as well. It is because of Langlois that Abel Gance's silent-era epic "Napoléon" (1927) survives. Langlois contrived to keep the Cinémathèque going during the Nazi Occupation, when American movies and most film societies were banned; and, after the Liberation of Paris, the Cinémathèque's tiny, sixty-seat screening room, on the Avenue de Messine, became the premier repertory house in France. Sartre and Beauvoir were habitués; so were Léger, Braque, Gide, and Georges Pompidou. And so were the cinephiles of the postwar generation—Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer, Rivette, Chabrol. The Cinémathèque is where the New Wave was born.

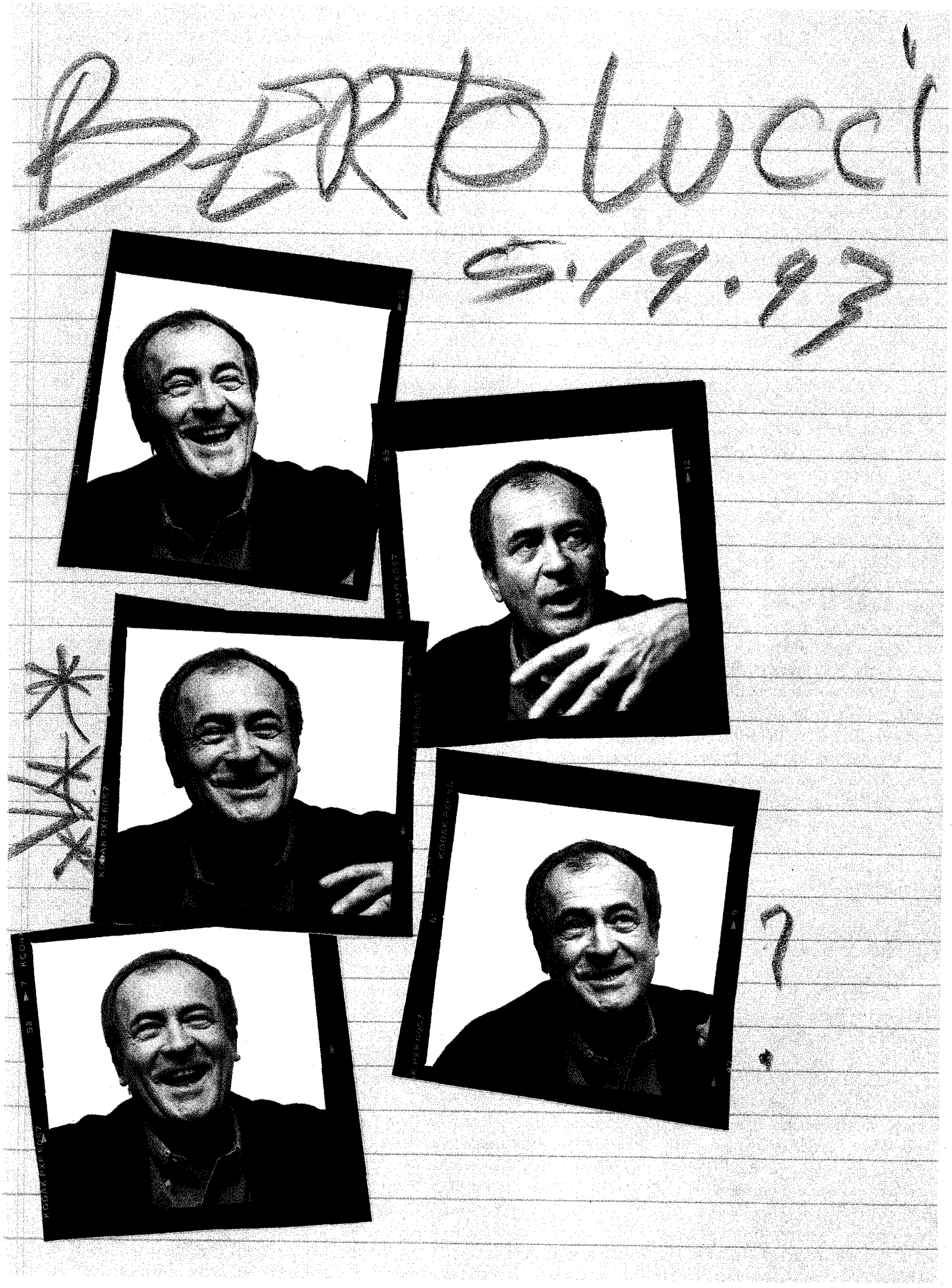
Langlois was a scavenger, and he had a scavenger's regard for ethical and personal decorum. In the beginning, he stored films in his bathtub, a practice that (as one historian, Herman Lebovics, has noted) gives an accurate measure of his commitment both to collecting and to hygiene. No one knew exactly how he obtained all of the films that ended up in his possession, or where they were stored. His reputation for obsessiveness was his principal business asset; for many years, people entrusted their films to him because they believed that he would protect them, if called upon, to the death.

Then came the Fifth Republic. When Charles de Gaulle took office as President of France, in 1959, he created a new Ministry of Culture and appointed his old comrade André Malraux (who had been a minister in de Gaulle's brief first government, in 1945-46) to head it. Malraux was a culture hero, too, though of a very different stripe. His celebrity was the public kind: as a prize-winning novelist; as a tank commander in the French Army and, after escaping from the Germans, an officer in the Resistance; as an art historian; and as an almost comically indefatigable promoter of French culture. One of his first acts as Minister of Culture was to create the *avance sur recettes*, a system of state subsidy that helped finance many of the movies that made the nineteen-sixties a period of renaissance for French film: "Last Year at Marienbad," "Cleo from 5 to 7," "Jules and Jim," "Diary of a Chambermaid," "Two or Three Things I Know About Her," and "Belle de Jour." Also "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg," "A Man and a Woman," and "King of Hearts."

Administration was not among Malraux's many talents. He seems to have been persuaded by people like Moinot, the director of Arts and Letters in his own ministry, that the Cinémathèque and its enormous collection had become too important to be left in the hands of a secretive, overweight, and badly groomed bohemian like Langlois. Langlois's administrative gifts were not great, either. He was accustomed to operate in a culture of personal loyalty based on common loyalty to an idea, the idea of cinema, and he was not disposed to answer to some bureaucrat for his expenses. He was not inclined to reveal the full extent of his collection, either, since not every movie's provenance could bear the light of day. Serious friction between Langlois and the government began with the opening of a big new auditorium for the Cinémathèque, made possible by Malraux, at the Palais de Chaillot, on the Right Bank, in 1963. The new facilities were part of a government plan to convert the Cinémathèque from a coterie club into a national institution, but Langlois was not converted along with it, and by the winter of 1968 the ministers had had enough. Barbin was inserted as director, the locks were changed, and vague promises of an advisory role for Langlois were duly uttered. The Gaullists must have imagined that movie lovers would approve the

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AVEDON

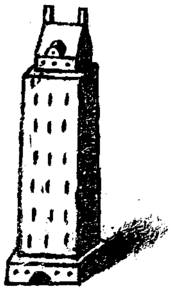
From "Before the Revolution" (1964) to "The Dreamers" (2003), the filmmaker has mixed political and private passions.


Bertolucci
5.19.93
?

changes; the idea, after all, was to give the Cinémathèque a sounder political and financial foundation, not to close it down. The Gaullists were mistaken.

The reaction was nearly instantaneous. Langlois was dismissed on a Friday. Within twenty-four hours, forty filmmakers, including Gance, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean Renoir, and Robert Bresson, had withdrawn permission for their films to be shown at what was soon referred to as the Barbinothèque. They were quickly joined by dozens more, including Charlie Chaplin, Roberto Rossellini, Fritz Lang, Richard Lester, Carl Dreyer, Orson Welles, and Jerry Lewis. On Wednesday, a crowd of three thousand showed up at the Trocadéro, in front of the Palais de Chaillot. The demonstration was broken up by a police charge, leaving a number of people slightly wounded, including Truffaut, Godard, and Bernard Tavernier.

By February 23rd, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the critical organ of the New Wave, had collected signatures from more than seven hundred people protesting Langlois's dismissal. Almost the entire French film industry, including directors, like Marcel Carné, who had little fondness for the *Cahiers* or the New Wave, put their names to the protest. So did more than a hundred foreign directors, among them Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Buñuel, Peter Brook, Alfred Hitchcock, Elia Kazan, Akira Kurosawa, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Satyajit Ray, and Andy Warhol. Jean-Paul Belmondo, Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve, Marlene Dietrich, Jane Fonda, Katharine Hepburn, Peter O'Toole, Toshiro Mifune, and Gloria Swanson appeared on the list; so did Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Alexander Calder, Truman Capote, Max Ernst, Eugène Ionesco, Pablo Picasso, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Telegrams continued to pour in: Henri Cartier-Bresson, Pauline Kael, Norman Mailer, Andrew Sarris, Susan Sontag, Iannis Xenakis. It was nearly a *Who's Who* of postwar arts and letters.



There were more demonstrations, more police violence, more telegrams and petitions. At one rally, Jean-Pierre Léaud, the actor who, as a fifteen-year-old, had played Antoine Doinel in Truffaut's "The 400 Blows" (1959), and was therefore almost the incarnation of the New Wave spirit, gave a speech exhorting the crowd. Malraux backed down. On April 22nd, the general assembly of the Cinémathèque convened and voted to reinstate Langlois, with the tacit approval of Malraux, who, in exchange, pulled the government's representatives from the assembly and cut funding to a minimum. The Cinémathèque was snatched back from the jaws of the state. On May 2nd, with some fanfare, Langlois reopened the Left Bank screening room, on the Rue d'Ulm. The next day, there were student demonstrations on the streets of Paris. By the twentieth, nearly ten million students and workers were on strike, and the country was virtually shut down. The Langlois Affair had nothing to do with the general strike, but for many people in France it has always seemed the dress rehearsal for the violent, ecstatic, and amazingly brief revolution of May '68—the revolution that vanished into air.

The Langlois Affair is the setting for Bernardo Bertolucci's new movie, "The Dreamers," which Bertolucci adapted from a novel, "The Holy Innocents" (1988), by the British writer Gilbert Adair. The movie is intense and languid, gritty and dreamy, sexy and silly, sentimental and pretentious, didactic and inconclusive—that is, pure Bertolucci. It is also—assuming, as one needs to with many of Bertolucci's movies, a willingness to suspend skeptical habits of viewing—rather beautiful in conception. There are three main characters: Matthew, an American film lover who has run off to Paris for reasons never fully explained; Isabelle, a darkly nubile young Frenchwoman; and her twin brother, Théo, also darkly nubile. They are twenty years old. Matthew (played by Michael Pitt) meets the twins in the spring of 1968 during a pro-Langlois demonstration at the Cinémathèque and is invited to dinner at their apartment; when the twins' parents leave Paris for the seashore, the three enter into a ménage à trois, a sexual and fraternal idyll, during which they rarely leave the house, and which lasts, apparently, several weeks. The story ends with the May riots.

The ménage is not consummated in every possible combination, which is a change from Adair's novel, where Matthew's tastes are, at first guiltily, homosexual, and where Isabelle (or Danielle, as she's called there) is described as physically boyish. (The actress who plays her in Bertolucci's movie, Eva Green, is not boyish.) Nor is there, strictly speaking, incest in the movie. The relation between Isabelle and Théo is completely uninhibited: they sleep in the same bed and perform sex acts in one another's presence. But Matthew does not have sex with Théo (who is played by Louis Garrel), and Théo, apart from masturbating in front of them, doesn't have sex with either his sister or Matthew. The movie is really the story of Matthew falling in love with an androgynous ideal, male and female halves of a metaphysical one. In the end, the halves cannot be parted, and the twins leave Matthew for the revolution. (Adair has said that he prefers Bertolucci's version, and intends to rewrite his novel.)

Still, "The Dreamers" has a ratings problem. It was shown, out of competition, at the Venice Film Festival, in September, but the American release is being held up because of the threat of an NC-17 rating (effectively an X). There is a good deal of nudity in "The Dreamers"; Eva Green wears nothing or next to nothing much of the time. More relevant, probably, are a few, detumescent seconds of (in ratings language) "male frontal"; they will probably be reduced to even fewer seconds, and the movie will be released, probably in March, with an R. It is natural for the film's story and ratings trouble to invite recollections of the previous movie Bertolucci shot in Paris, but this is not 1972, and "The Dreamers" is not "Last Tango in Paris."

The road to "Last Tango" runs through the Cinémathèque. Bertolucci was born in 1941 near Parma—in the province that also produced a figure of whom he is in every way the artistic descendant, Giuseppe Verdi. Bertolucci's father, Attilio, was a distinguished poet and an enormous presence in his son's life. He turns up repeatedly in the father figures in Bernardo's movies, including "The Dreamers," where the father of those interesting twins is supposed to be a famous French poet. Alberto Moravia was a friend. So was Pier Paolo Pasolini, who lived downstairs from the family after they moved to Rome, in 1952. In 1959, as a high-school graduation present, Bertolucci's parents sent him for a month to Paris, where, at the dawn of the New

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Wave, he attended the Cinémathèque, and fell in love with cinema.

In 1961, Bertolucci dropped out of the University of Rome to work as a production assistant on Pasolini's first film, "Accattone." Pasolini knew very little about film—he had contributed to a few screenplays, but rarely went to the movies—and Bertolucci later described working with him as like watching a man invent cinema. Bertolucci made his own first feature in 1962, when he was twenty-one—"The Grim Reaper," from a story by Pasolini. His next movie, finished in 1963, was "Before the Revolution," a story, loosely based on "The Charterhouse of Parma," about a young Italian Communist who has a nine-month affair with his attractive, much older, and slightly crazy aunt, but who, disillusioned by the Party's lack of revolutionary commitment, abandons her—the climactic scene takes place in the Parma opera house during a performance of Verdi's "Macbeth"—and marries a pretty bourgeoise to please his family. "Fabrizio accepts everything now," his mother says in the dénouement.

Apart from Pasolini, who cited the movie in a famous essay, "The Cinema of Poetry," in 1965, the Italians hated "Before the Revolution." The French adored it. The movie was screened during the Critics' Week at Cannes in 1964, where it won prizes and was identified by French critics as "an homage to the school of the *Cahiers*," which it certainly was. Bertolucci had been a regular reader of the *Cahiers* almost since he was a child—he was introduced to the magazine by his father, who wrote movie reviews as well as poetry—and he was an acolyte of Godard, whose stylistic fingerprints are all over the movie. Bertolucci became the New Wave's adopted Italian. He went to Paris and met Godard, Langlois, Agnès Varda. Though no one could see his movie, because it lacked a distributor, it became a critical touchstone at the *Cahiers*. (The movie also played a role in the so-called Hollywood New Wave; it is an influence on Martin Scorsese's first major picture, "Mean Streets," which came out in 1973.) For his part, Bertolucci used to say that he preferred to give interviews in French, on the ground that French is the true language of cinema. Langlois himself was responsible for the French release of "Before the Revolution," which finally happened in 1968. The *Cahiers* critics all awarded it four stars, their highest rating—"chef d'œuvre." By 1968, student radicals were citing it as explanation and inspiration, and the phrase "before the revolution" appeared in accounts of the events of May in the French press.

The words are taken from a remark of Talleyrand's: "He who did not live in the years before the revolution cannot understand what the sweetness of living is." Bertolucci insisted that he meant the title ironically, that life "before the revolution" is agony; he has his protagonist mutter, despairingly, "It's always 'before the revolution' if you're like me." But with movies you believe the camera—what the camera loves cannot be all bad—and the camera tells us that although Talleyrand was undoubtedly on the wrong side, he was not wrong. "At first my story was a modern 'Charterhouse,' " Bertolucci explained in an interview in the *Cahiers* in 1965, "but then it gradually developed into 'Sentimental Education.' " Fabrizio is not a revolutionary; he is playing at being a revolutionary, because that is what young people in the postwar middle class do. His kind of revolution is just a chapter in the bourgeois family romance (thus the incest: it violates the norms of the nuclear family). If "Before the Revolution" is a prophecy of the rebellion of May '68, in which students from the Sorbonne marched in solidarity with workers from the Renault auto plants, it is also a prophecy of its failure.

Bertolucci was not in Paris for the events of May. He was in Rome, making "Partner," a Godardesque mélange of dogma and surrealism. But his star, Pierre Clémenti, flew to Paris on weekends and brought back stories of the revolution, which, Bertolucci later said, they used as material for the scenes they were shooting. In 1969, Bertolucci joined the Italian Communist Party. He also went into analysis. The analysis explains a lot more about his movies than the Communism does.

Killing the father is a theme that turns up fairly often in interviews with Bertolucci. In "The Conformist" (1970), Bertolucci killed Godard. The movie was adapted from Alberto Moravia's novel, published in 1951. Its protagonist, Marcello Clerici, is a police spy in Mussolini's government who is sent to Paris to arrange the assassination of a Professor Quadri, an Italian émigré and political opponent of the regime. Clerici's principal task is to supply Quadri's address to the men who will carry out the killing. The address and telephone number that Bertolucci assigned to Quadri in the movie were Godard's.

The cold formalism of "The Conformist," so unlike the hot formalism of Godard, matches the cold formalism of the protagonist, a man who will admit to only one desire, the desire to be normal. Moravia plainly created Clerici in order to explain something about the sort of person who is attracted to fascism; for Bertolucci, though, the politics was less important. He entirely changed the ending of the novel, in which Clerici and his family are killed in an Allied air raid, closing instead with the famous shot of Jean-Louis Trintignant sitting in the rubble of liberated Rome, looking over his shoulder at a male streetwalker—a question mark left hanging forever, like the freeze-frame of Jean-Pierre Léaud's face at the end of "The 400 Blows." The movie made Bertolucci an international success, and its imagery, its colors, and its brilliantly managed tempo provided the palette for the first two "Godfather" movies, in 1972 and 1974. And Coppola, after borrowing the palette, borrowed the paintbrush, hiring Bertolucci's cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, to shoot "Apocalypse Now."

"Last Tango in Paris" was made from a screenplay that Bertolucci wrote with Franco Arcalli. Agnès Varda contributed some of the dialogue; so (uncredited) did Moravia. Bertolucci had wanted to use Trintignant and Dominique Sanda, who played Quadri's bisexual wife in "The Conformist"; but Trintignant was too shy and Sanda was pregnant. Bertolucci was able to persuade Marlon Brando to play the male character, Paul, by showing him "The Conformist." (Brando had finished filming "The Godfather," but the movie had not yet come out.) Maria Schneider, who plays Jeanne, was the result of a casting call.

"Last Tango" premièred on October 14, 1972, the last night of the New York Film Festival. It was an event. A week later, Pauline Kael announced, in *The New Yorker*, that the date "should become a landmark in movie history comparable to May 29, 1913—the night 'Le Sacre du Printemps' was first performed—in music history. . . . Bertolucci and Brando have altered the face of an art form." In December, "Last Tango" opened

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PATRICK STEWART

KYLE MACLACHLAN

AIDAN GILLEN

THE CARETAKER

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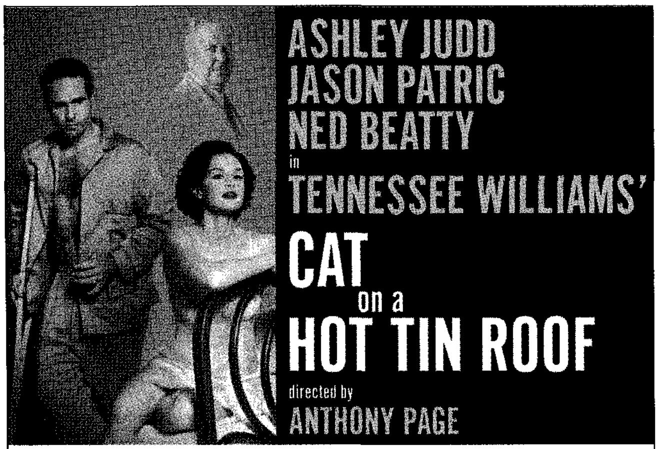

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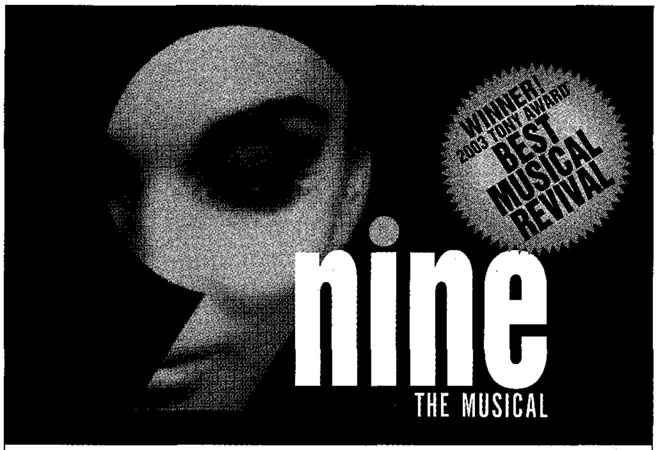
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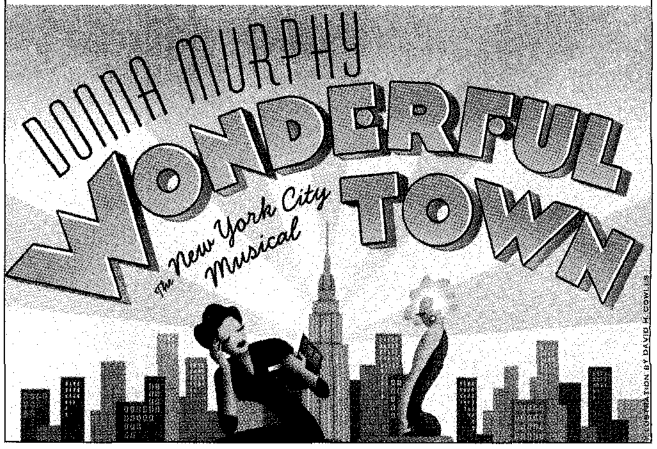
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The New York City Musical
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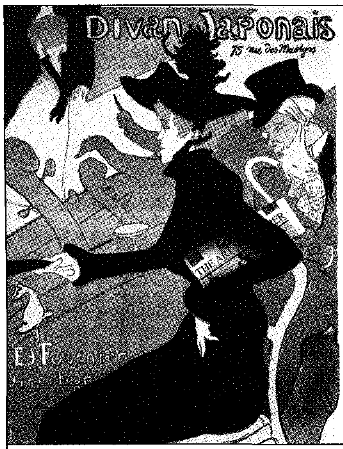

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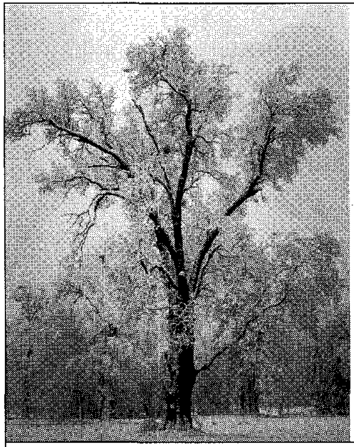

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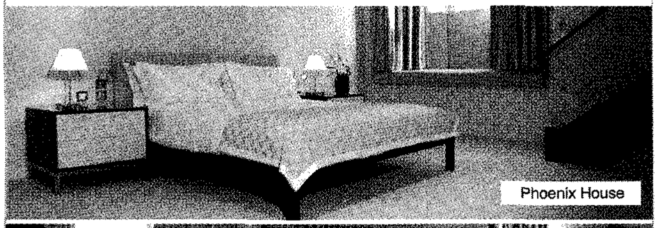

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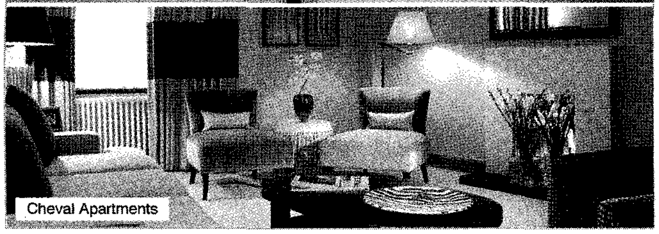

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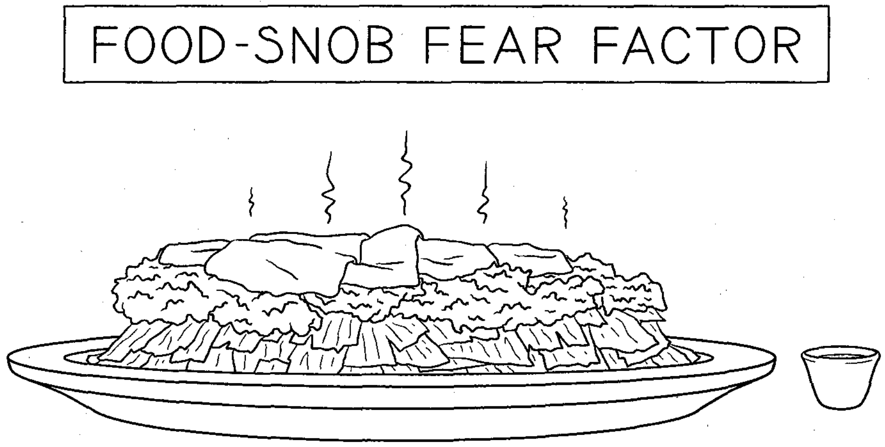

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in Paris and sold a million tickets in a month. It opened in New York City in January, 1973, with tickets at the premium price of five dollars. It was a smash in London. It was banned in Spain. In Italy, the prints were seized by order of the public prosecutor. The order was rescinded by a court, but the prosecution appealed and, eventually, in 1976, succeeded in banning the film. It was not shown in Italy again until 1987. Bertolucci was stripped of his right to vote for five years.

What was Kael so excited about? She thought that Bertolucci had solved a problem that was threatening legitimate cinema. The problem was sex. "Last Tango in Paris" was released seven months after "Deep Throat" (a depressing and unfunny anaphrodisiac if there ever was one) inexplicably made hard-core chic. "Last Tango" was a commercial success in the United States: it cost United Artists—whose parent company, Transamerica, was not thrilled to be associated with the product—a million dollars to make, and it ended up grossing more than thirty million here. But "Deep Throat," also a five-dollar ticket in New York, is estimated to have grossed more than forty million, and it cost twenty-five thousand dollars. You could have made it on a credit card. "The Devil in Miss Jones," which opened around the same time as "Last Tango," finished at No. 7 in 1973 American box-office revenues, just behind "Live and Let Die." There was a market out there; there was also, apparently, critical interest. Intellectuals were taking the stuff seriously. The question was how far Hollywood was prepared to go down the road to explicitness.

As Jon Lewis points out in "Hollywood v. Hardcore" (2000), the problem arose partly from the replacement of the Production Code with the ratings system. When Jack Valenti became head of the Motion Picture Association of America, in May, 1966, the old world of the Code was in collapse. He found himself sitting in a three-hour meeting trying to decide whether "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" could be released with the words "screw" and "hump the hostess." ("Hump the hostess" was permitted; "screw" was censored.) A few months later, M-G-M released Antonioni's "Blow-Up," featuring female nudity in an orgy scene, without M.P.A.A. approval. It was the first time a major studio had distributed a film with frontal nudity in it. And the nudity sold tickets. I remember seeing "Blow-Up" as a fifteen-year-old, in 1967. There was a middle-aged couple seated behind me in the theatre. When one of the girls in the orgy scene took off her top, the man turned to his wife. "There they are," he said.

Sensing that matters were starting to get out of M.P.A.A. control, Valenti introduced the ratings system, in 1968. But he did an interesting thing: he copyrighted the ratings G, M (soon changed to PG), and R, but not the X rating. In other words, no company could advertise its movie as G-, PG-, or R-rated unless the M.P.A.A. had reviewed it, but anyone could use the X. Valenti's idea, apparently, was to identify, with the R, a market niche for movies made for grownups, and to delegitimatize hard-core by causing the X to be associated with raunchy, low-budget porn. Which, eventually, is what happened, but for a while it wasn't at all clear how Hollywood would define its own limits. And the unsettled state of obscenity law made things even more uncertain. No one knew how much frontal the Supreme Court would put up with.

"Last Tango in Paris" was given an X by the M.P.A.A., and it was as an X-rated movie that Kael responded to it. This was X for grownups, she was essentially saying. When hard-core entered the mainstream, she said, "we had expected *artistic* blue movies, talented directors taking over from the *Shlockmeisters* and making sophisticated voyeuristic fantasies that would be gorgeous fun—a real turn-on. What nobody had talked about was a sex film that would churn up everybody's emotions." That, she believed, was what Bertolucci had done. Norman Mailer disagreed. His reply to Kael ran in *The New York Review of Books* in May, 1973, when the movie was near the peak of its celebrity. Mailer was not an entirely disinterested interlocutor, since Kael had, in her review of "Last Tango," taken the occasion to hold up Mailer's own movies, "Wild 90" and "Beyond the Law," as examples of failure in the same line. But Mailer made the basic point: the sex in Bertolucci's movie may be realistic sex, but it is not real sex. "Brando's real cock up Schneider's real vagina would have brought the history of film one huge march closer to the ultimate experience it has promised since its inception," as he suavely formulated the problem.

And, after all, Brando never has his pants off while he simulates sex in the movie. Bertolucci tried a scene with male frontal, in fact, but it didn't work. "It was such a cold day," Brando explained, "that my penis shrank to the size of a peanut." Schneider's naked body is shot from nearly every conceivable angle, but Brando, already on the way to his fat phase, was photographed with great circumspection. Whatever Bertolucci was trying to do with his movie, pushing the genital envelope was not crucial to him. To the extent that people like Mailer, excited by the hardcore insurgency though disappointed by the product, were proposing sexual authenticity as the test for artistic authenticity, Bertolucci declined the gambit. He was making a movie, and the first truth about movies is that they are fake.

By the time Bertolucci's "Luna" came out, in 1979, the world had lost interest in cinematic boundaries. The Supreme Court, in cases, decided in 1973 and 1974, involving local bans on obscene material, had basically handed over to the M.P.A.A. the authority to make the distinction between legal and illegal sex. If it was an R, the Constitution shielded it. (The movie in that case was "Carnal Knowledge.") If it was an X, though, the Court would not overturn a ban. "Luna" was an R, but American critics ridiculed it. Donald Barthelme, in *The New Yorker*, called it "near-ludicrous," to which one can only say yes, but you have to get over that. A lot of Verdi is near-ludicrous, too; so, for that matter, is Brando talking about farting pigs while being digitally sodomized by Maria Schneider. With "Luna," Bertolucci deliberately set out to make a sentimental melodrama, a melodrama that happens to be the story of an opera singer's incestuous relations with her fifteen-year-old son, who is a heroin addict.

Jill Clayburgh, who plays the singer, is as wonderful as Brando and Schneider are in the earlier film. Their wonderfulness comes from their complete willingness (for which the director can take a good deal of credit) to play characters who can express themselves only sexually. (Both Schneider and Brando were shattered by the experience, and for years could barely bring themselves to talk to Bertolucci.) Clayburgh's character, Caterina, is a successful but not very intelligent or articulate woman. She's a singer, a person who is somehow more theatrical and less convincing offstage than she is onstage—just as Brando, when his sexual idyll is over, turns out to be a chattering middle-aged man whose trousers are too short, and Schneider reverts to her bourgeois self and marries her boyfriend, a dippy self-styled filmmaker, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud. When Caterina sees her son's misery, she knows no way to console him except with a parody of the way a mother consoles a baby: she masturbates him while he sucks at her breast. Caterina uses sex as therapy for life's unhappiness even though she knows, with terrible clarity, that using sex as therapy only prolongs the unhappiness. Her sexuality, like Brando's in "Last Tango," is pure and seductive and tragic. Jeanne shoots Paul at the end of "Last Tango" not because she is too shallow to appreciate what he is offering her but because liberation, on those terms, leads to death.

Tragedy is what "The Dreamers" does not have. The characters are young and strong and beautiful. They don't carry, on their perfect bodies, marks of mortality; and though, at the end of their idyll, they flirt with self-destruction, we know they are not going to die, because they have no reason to die. The actors are pretty to watch, even fascinating to watch; but they do not engage. "The Dreamers" will make some people think of Truffaut's movie about a threesome, "Jules and Jim" (1962), but a much more obvious precursor is Jean-Pierre Melville's 1950 adaptation of Jean Cocteau's strange story of sibling love, "Les Enfants Terribles." The brother and sister in "Les Enfants Terribles" are not lovable; they're terrible.

"You can't hide in a room," Bertolucci once said, commenting on the meaning of "Last Tango"; "reality will come in through the window." In "The Dreamers," he cashes the metaphor: a rock crashes through the window of the twins' apartment. "The street came into the room," Isabelle explains. It is May, '68, and kids are throwing rocks at the police. The lovers rush outside to join them. Matthew refuses to participate in the violence, so the twins leave him behind. Molotov cocktails are thrown, the police charge, and the credits roll. Behind them, Bertolucci plays Piaf: "*Non, rien de rien. Non, je ne regrette rien.*"

Don't regret what, exactly? Bertolucci's own comments about his movie do no better with this question than anyone else's: we were all pretty deluded back then, but at least we had dreams is the general line. Bertolucci has already mocked this view, in "Luna." "Oh, the sixties," Caterina says, dancing gaily at a party, "when we believed in . . . *things*." It is an odd, delayed phenomenon of moments of upheaval, like 1968, that at a certain point they stop looking like movements forward and suddenly reveal themselves to have been, at some deeper level, movements backward.

One of the most astute comments on the Langlois Affair was made by the great French journalist Françoise Giroud—the woman who, in an article about postwar French youth, in 1957, coined the term New Wave. "We have come to this paradoxical situation," she wrote of the anti-Malraux protesters, in *L'Express*, in March, 1968: "For the most part, these are 'left-leaning' people who want to wrest the Cinémathèque away from the state in order to turn it back into a private enterprise!" High-end French film culture was a private club. You had to pass a test of connoisseurship to belong. Every step toward making it public and democratic was secretly feared, and therefore loudly attacked as a bureaucratic and nationalistic encroachment on the sort of freethinking cosmopolitanism the protesters imagined themselves to represent.

But Langlois did not prevail because Godard had his eyeglasses knocked off by the police or because Jean-Pierre Léaud read a speech to the crowd (a clip of which is included in "The Dreamers"). He prevailed because among the friendships he had cultivated in a lifetime of friendship cultivation was that of Jean Riboud and his wife, Krishna, a film enthusiast. Jean Riboud happened to be the chief executive of Schlumberger, the global French oil-services company. He was a man the French government listened to, and he was the intercessor who worked out the deal that allowed Langlois to return from his brief exile. And Langlois also succeeded because Barbin, inexplicably, let it be known that he planned to demand that a copy of every film distributed in France be donated to the Cinémathèque, at a cost of a million francs (about a thousand dollars today). Immediately, the head of the Motion Picture Export Association of America, Frederick Gronich, informed the French government that not only would no prints of American movies be deposited at the Cinémathèque until Langlois was reinstated but all prints already on deposit must be returned within twenty-four hours. Barbin was advised to back down. The Motion Picture Export Association of America is the shadow ruler of the French film industry, for it is, ultimately, the dog that guards the American film market. If you annoy the dog, you don't get in the house. The empire, in other words, defeated the nation. And what was at stake?

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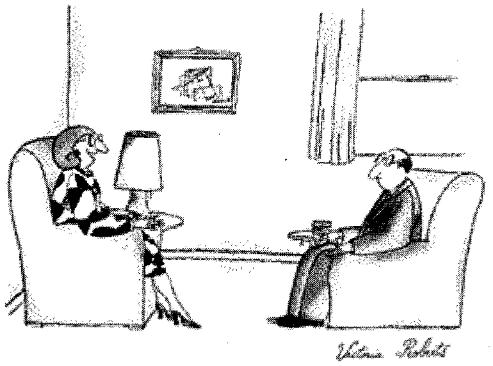

"Don't worry, Howard. The big questions are multiple choice."

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Nothing, really, since the age of the repertory cinema and the art house was over, anyway. The Cinémathèque was saved, but it was already a museum, an attraction for tourists like Matthew on their trip to Paris. The events of May lasted only until June, when de Gaulle's party won a landslide victory in general elections. May was a bubble in the cauldron of modernization that had been brewing in France since 1945.

Still, it was a bubble in which it was good to be young and middle-class. All the normal personal rebelliousness of youth seemed magically echoed in the great world outside. Kids, for the most part, were inside having sex and arguing about whether Jimi Hendrix was a better guitarist than Eric Clapton; but they were aware, in some half-formed way, that something was happening in the streets, and the revolution outside seemed to them perfectly continuous with the little revolution of casting off the middle-class moral code. It was, on the whole, not such a bad dawn in which to be alive.

Bertolucci does his best to reanimate the moment: the incestuousness reproduces, a little bit, the frisson of personal rebellion then. But it's a struggle, and it shows. The present-day Léaud makes a brief appearance in "The Dreamers," alongside the clip of his younger self. He's put on weight. So has Bertolucci. So has the teen-age boy who smiled at the squares behind him watching "Blow-Up." "The Dreamers" has not been well received by the left-wing press in France. "*Monstre kitsch*," *Libération* called it. Bertolucci may once have been a man of the left, the paper said (citing, naturally, "Before the Revolution"), but that was before he became "*l'un des mammouths de la superproduction auteuriste de luxe*."

It's not his fault. It happens—like when you revisit your kindergarten classroom and are amazed by how tiny the chairs are. There is a reason, I think, that the parents in "The Dreamers," though they are not onscreen very long, are more compelling than the children, mysterious and somehow lovely in their maturity. They see, at some point, what has been going on in the apartment while they were away at the seashore, and though they decide not to interfere, it plainly doesn't make sense to them. They're too old. Bertolucci knows all about this estrangement, for his camera loves the parents, and we should trust the camera. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

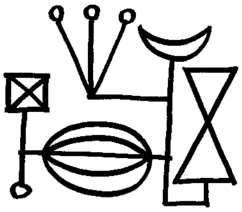
At the Movies

Orson Welles, *by Peter Conrad (Faber & Faber; $25).* Orson Welles achieved early, revolutionary success with "Citizen Kane," only to follow that film with nearly half a century of false starts and compromised productions. The great, self-sabotaging Welles remains one of cinema's lasting enigmas. Conrad doesn't attempt a standard biography; instead he considers the man through the archetypes on which he drew as an actor and director—Falstaff, Don Quixote, Faust. It's a brilliant way to explore this mercurial prodigy who conceived of his life in mythic terms and (the other side of this coin) told frequent lies about it. Conrad, an Oxford don whose books include an unconventional study of Hitchcock, writes with erudite agility, making excursions into Romantic poetry, Shakespeare, and the history of radio and film. The result is an idiosyncratic monument to Welles, one that both explains and amplifies the legend.

Sixty-six, *by Barry Levinson (Broadway; $24).* "Sixty-six" is a sequel of sorts to the film "Diner," Levinson's hit début as a director, which dealt with a group of male friends sorting out life and love in 1959 Baltimore. Here, as the title indicates, the setting is seven years later, but that's about the only change. The characters from the movie have been replaced by a nearly identical set who also hang out in a diner, spinning lazy webs of conversation about women, jobs, politics, and football. Bobby Shine, the narrator, has quit law school to work at a local TV station while his buddies variously get drafted, sell cars, and fight over girls. The scenes in the diner are gently funny, and Levinson's evident affection for his characters makes you want to like them, too, but in the end "Sixty-six" resembles its callow narrator, coming up short on energy, depth, and purpose.

The Movies of My Life, *by Alberto Fuguet, translated from the Spanish by Ezra E. Fitz (Rayo; $24.95).* Fuguet is a leading member of the Latin-American literary movement McOndo, which seeks to supplant magic-realist imaginings with urban, pop-inflected globalism. In this novel, Beltrán, a Chilean seismologist, uses a list of fifty favorite films to narrate his émigré childhood in California and his return to Santiago as a ten-year-old during the turmoil of the nineteen-seventies. If the device at times feels heavy-handed—his mother's affair with a married man falls under "An Unmarried Woman"—it can also be chillingly incisive, as when the disappearances in "Soylent Green" are juxtaposed with those of Pinochet's Chile. The adult Beltrán is a less successful character, his cold detachment at odds with his fond reminiscences of adolescent life. Still, Fuguet has created a modern bildungsroman in which American culture enhances, rather than suffocates, the protagonist's understanding of his native country.

Death by Hollywood, *by Steven Bochco (Random House; $24.95).* "Writers, by definition, are voyeurs," Eddie Jelko, a Hollywood agent and the cynical narrator of this steamy thriller, explains. One of his clients, a screenwriter named Bobby Newman, peers through his state-of-the-art telescope one night and spies a billionaire's trophy wife murdering her Latin lover. This being Hollywood, he doesn't call the police but, desperate for a good story to revive his flagging career, decides to write about the crime and befriends both the killer and the detective by way of research. Bochco delights in Hollywood sleaze, and his years in the industry (he co-created "NYPD Blue" and "L.A. Law") have given him a good ear for its vicious banter. The conniving characters, though shamelessly stereotypical, are painted with exuberant vigor, and, as the plot accelerates to its inevitable twist, Bochco maintains a seductive atmosphere where nothing is what it seems and someone is always watching.



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THE ART WORLD

HOLY TOLEDO

El Greco at the Met.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"We can define El Greco's work by saying that what he did well none did better, and that what he did badly none did worse," the Spanish painter and scholar Antonio Palomino wrote in 1724. That violently mixed assessment struck me as just right when I read it on a wall of the Metropolitan Museum's current, tremendous El Greco retrospective. Critical quotations, pro and con, pepper the show's superb installation by the curator David Davies; they vivify the warring opinions provoked by El Greco in his lifetime and ever since, except for a spell of near-oblivion that ended in the nineteenth century, when, like Vermeer, he was rescued by French aesthetes. A bit later, Picasso took him as a formative influence and thereby installed him in the boiler room of modern painting. El Greco feels at issue in art again today, as new painters, notably John Currin, raid museums for nuggets of refractory inspiration. To consider the Master of Toledo is still and always to engage in argument—with oneself, as likely as not. At the show, I found myself alternately cheering and cringing, inwardly, like the fan of a talented but goof-prone sports team.

The glory and the problem of El Greco are the same: spirituality. No other great artist takes this fundamental, usually ineffable aspect of experience so literally, as an open secret. He does so in terms of strict Catholic doctrine, but with an energy that a person of any faith, or of none, may recognize. His art affirms spirituality—the awareness that glimmers at the headspring of consciousness, prior to thought and feeling—as the primary fact of life, always on tap. This jolts people into love or loathing of El Greco, depending on how they relate to the spiritual in themselves. Spiritual intimations trickle through all minds, however obscurely, and even while discounted or ignored. El Greco delivers them with a fire hose.

Crete was a Venetian colony when, in 1541, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, as El Greco never ceased to sign himself, was born there. He trained as an icon painter in a local variant of the archaic Byzantine manner, whose rigid formulas were aimed less at representing the divine than at magically summoning it. In Venice for three years, from the age of twenty-six, he assimilated the most advanced painting of the day: Titian, Tintoretto, Bassano. Venetian painterly rhetoric—bodies in dramatic motion, open brushwork, clarion color—imprinted on him, but without changing his metaphysics. He failed to start a career in Rome, where he seems to have burned bridges by disparaging Michelangelo, whose carnal sublimity—submerging the spirit in straining muscles—was bound to affront the young Greek. El Greco reportedly offered to repaint "The Last Judgment" in a more seemly manner. Still, he picked up tricks of composition from Michelangelo, as witness the rhythmic aggregate of contorted bodies in his several versions of "The Purification of the Temple"—Jesus scourging the sacrilegious. He was a quick study.

By 1576, when he was thirty-five, El Greco had followed his ambition to Spain, whose art-loving King Philip II was on top of the world after organizing European forces against the Turks for the monumental victory at Lepanto, in 1571. El Greco made an apparent bid for royal favor with a ghastly painting, "The Adoration of the Name of Jesus," which is an arduous hodgepodge of practically everything that he knew how to do, from medieval grotesquerie to Titianesque elegance, and features a passage of unforgettably hideous orange. (In El Greco, successful color comes and goes like a gambler's luck.) Turned away at court, he alit in Toledo, the ecclesiastical capital of Spain, where he remained for the next thirty-seven years, until his

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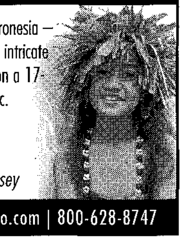

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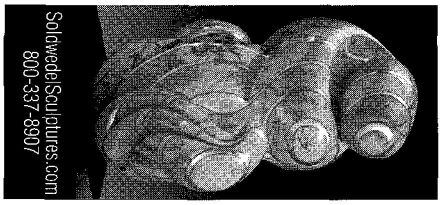

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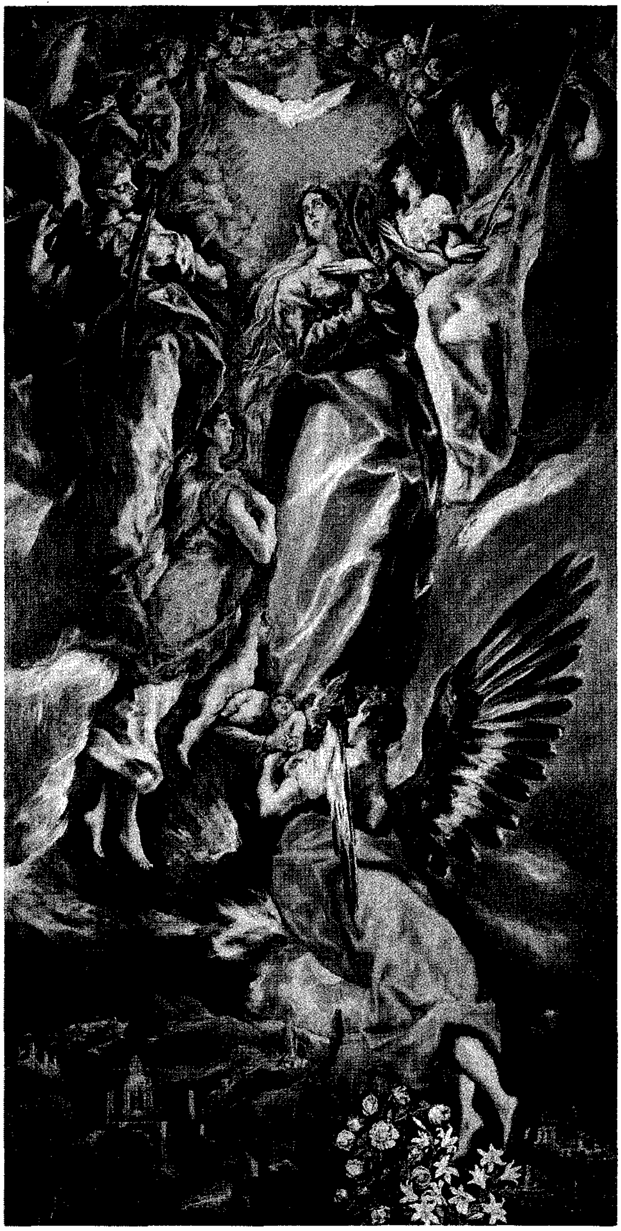
death, in 1614. Records of furious litigation over payment for most of his major commissions bespeak an obstreperous character. He lived high, at one point renting twenty-four rooms in a palace and employing musicians to play while he dined. He had, and acknowledged, a son by a Spanish woman soon after arriving in Toledo; he never married. Active intellectually, he pressed for official recognition of painting as a liberal art. To gauge the status of painting in Spain at that time, consider that El Greco was paid three hundred and fifty ducats for his first major Toledan commission, "The Disrobing of Christ," and (albeit ten years later) five hundred and seventy for crafting the picture's frame.

El Greco's temperament was on time for one of the most disputatious eras in European history: the Counter-Reformation. The Inquisition and Ignatius Loyola's Jesuits were on the march. At the same time, though with some reluctance, the Church chose to exploit rather than to suppress the intense, gorgeous, personalized writings of the mystics Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross. The Protestant threat argued for letting popular wildflowers bloom. El Greco found his path to fame as a pictorial rhapsode of militant piety. Is his blend of iron dogma and unbridled spontaneity a paradox? It is certainly special.

El Greco's later ecstatic paintings are somewhat downplayed in the Met show, which concentrates on his terrific, strange, less well-known portraits. Lacking any consistent look, the portraits adapt Venetian styles with antic originality—one tour de force after another, striking the odd spark of psychological insight but conveying little sense of everyday social engagement. El Greco's two greatest portraits might as well be classed with his religious paintings, as spiritual images. One conjures up the ravishingly alert friar-poet Hortensio Félix Paravicino. The other is "A Cardinal," who is generally acknowledged to be the Inquisitor General Niño de Guevara. Modern eyes see the bespectacled prelate—tensed in his vermillion robes, suggesting a frozen flame atop a torch—as repellently cruel; but I think that El Greco regards severity as part of the man's important job and a good thing for everybody. The portrait is savagely upbeat.



"*The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*" *(ca. 1608-13).*

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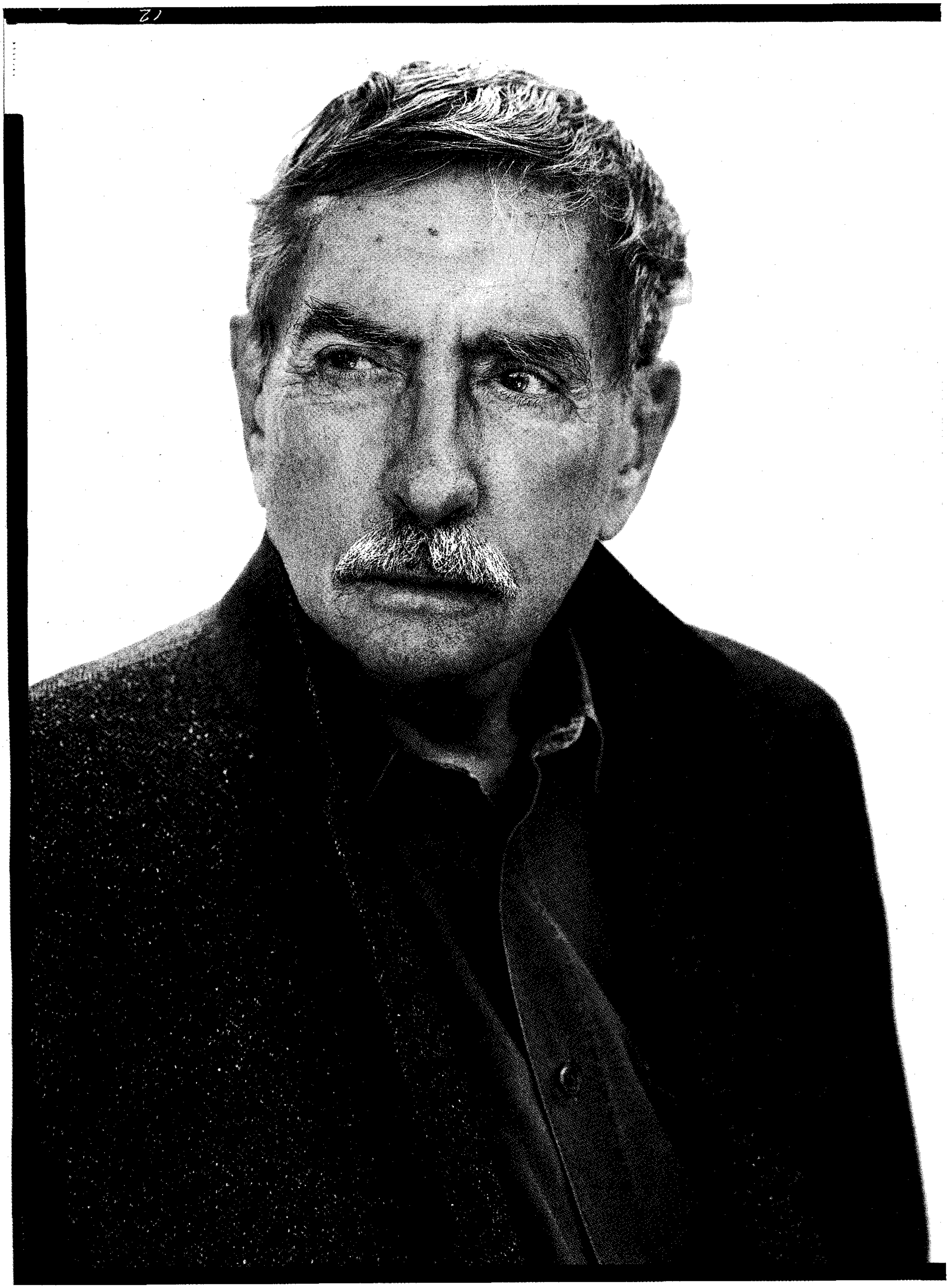
I am of the party that questions El Greco's authorship of "A Lady in a Fur Wrap" (surmised to be from the late fifteen-seventies), an enigmatic portrait whose vivacious ease with a pretty woman seems alien to him; if it is his, it may either depict Doña Jerónima de las Cuevas, the mother of his son, or betray a holiday of passion that left no other historical trace. The most persuasive evidence for an attribution to El Greco is how poorly, in so fine a work, the sitter's hand is rendered. When not stylizing hands and feet as willowy, tapering forms, he could be an amazing klutz with those items of anatomy. Truth to nature didn't interest him. He preferred variations to themes, stepping up to a canvas and whaling away. He was most himself—vulgar and supreme, pummelling and thrilling—when excitedly envisioning a force that I think of as upside-down gravity.

Try this: Turn a reproduction of one of the tall mystical paintings on its head. Observe how the stretched, writhing figures snug down luxuriantly, enfolded by a thick liquid medium of clouds and sky, into which they are sinking. The figures' elongation is like that of descending blobs in a lava lamp. Seen upright again, the vertical tug or, really, suck of the composition—a slow-motion celestial tornado—is easy to read. To enjoy the effect, you must let it commandeer your own body in sympathetic imagination. I find that I can soar readily on the thermal of, for example, "The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception" (between 1608 and 1613), with its bizarre rocket form of an angel's wing seen end on. Clinching the deal is a visceral paint texture that makes the picture a kind of palpitating body in itself. El Greco's great subject is the translation of matter into spirit, caught on the cusp.

Finally, the show left me with rather an overdose of exaltation—as I realized upon emerging from it into the Met's gallery of early Baroque paintings, including two by Caravaggio of fleshy, louchely simpering boy musicians. I've never felt gladder in my life to loiter with those rascals. Not for them any divine updrafts. They're fine with gravity, among other involuntary powers. Throw in music, wine, fresh fruit, and whomever they're vamping, and Heaven can jolly well take the night off. ♦



THE THEATRE

HE SAID, SHE SAID

One-acts by Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett.

BY HILTON ALS

For many years after the phenomenal success of his magisterial early work, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" (1962), the playwright Edward Albee suffered a critical reversal of fortune. Audiences that had delighted in the arch-anarchy that Albee expressed in his first one-act plays, such as "The Zoo Story" (1960) and "The Death of Bessie Smith" (1961), felt that the author's promise had been more than fulfilled by "Woolf," which was his first full-length play. In it, Albee unveiled a brutal—and brutalizing—deeply verbal, and emotionally deceptive world in which he reinvented Arthur Miller's "realism" and Tennessee Williams's lyricism by taking each a step further. Albee exposed the truth in lies, and the lies we cannot live without.

The first Broadway run of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" ended in 1964, when Albee was thirty-six. In his subsequent plays—brilliant theatrical innovations ranging from "Tiny Alice" (1964) to "The Play About the Baby" (2000)—he delved deeper into the themes he had earlier established as his own: marriage as an illusion that does nothing to dispel one's essential fear, anger, and loneliness; maternal love as a smiling trap that, upon closer inspection, reveals gnashing teeth. Critics began to be put off. They complained that Albee's post-"Woolf" work was vague, out of focus, or confused—variations on themes that should have grown stale for Albee (as they had for his audience).

But time generally reveals what fools we mortals be, and certainly when it comes to our artists. Now Albee has been embraced by his detractors for having survived as a highly literate, skilled writer, in an atmosphere of intellectual blight. In recent years, he has been the recipient of many honors (his 2002 play, "The Goat; or, Who Is Sylvia?," won the Tony for best play). But Albee's style remains little understood, despite the accolades.

His 1976 one-act play, "Counting the Ways" (at the Century Center), which concludes the "Beckett/Albee" program, opens on a brightly lit sitting room. Two high-backed chairs, covered in crisp white linen, stand on either side of a white oval table. Upstage, two white door frames indicate the room's wall. This is where She (Marian Seldes) and He (Brian Murray) engage in and play out the kind of exchange that constitutes the repetition at the heart of marriage—indeed, at the heart of coupling of any kind. Opening the door to the marital arena, Seldes asks, in the cheeriest of voices, "Do you *love* me?" And they're off:

> HE: Hm? Pardon?
> SHE: Do you love me?
> HE: Why do you ask?
> SHE: Well, because I want to know.
> HE: Right *now*?
> SHE: Well . . . *yes.* Or . . . no, no, not really. *(Short pause.) Yes.*
> HE: Of course.
> SHE: Well . . . good.

Then the scene goes black. As played by the incomparable Seldes and Murray, He and She don't exactly spar, but they do jostle. (The actors have been directed with great subtlety and care by Lawrence Sacharow.) They're a well-bred, upper-middle-class Punch and Judy, wielding verbal bats, who are conducting an inquiry into the human heart almost as if neither of them had one—or as if they'd repressed it for the sake of glittering repartee. Or are they really talking about possession? (Albee has said that he admires Noël Coward. It must have amused him to throw blood on the walls of Coward's drawing-room comedies.) As with many of Albee's over-intellectualizing couples, Seldes is the instigator of action, while Murray prefers to sit in silence, in the not-so-easy chair of reflection. The "drama" lies in each character's trying to convert the other to his way of being. The futility of this—the antagonistic forces of need and resistance—leaves them frustrated and evasive.

Seldes wants to know, over and over, whether Murray loves her, but he can't even remember how many children they've had together—and, besides, he's much more interested in recalling his love of Auden's poetry. Seldes makes a list and checks it twice. Domestic order defines her. After their first conversation, the lights come up on Seldes, standing stage right, going over a list of needs:

> SHE: Walnuts! Parsley! Bone marrow! Celery root! Crème brûlée! *(Pause, enthusiastic.)* Do you love me?! . . . I *knew* you did!

Again, the stage goes black. "Counting the Ways" is divided into twenty short scenes, which, altogether, last less than an hour. Albee has called the play "a vaudeville." But his definition of this funny and moving piece feels a bit limiting, as if calling it a vaudeville helped the audience consider it "entertaining." Who can blame him? The various interpretations of his work—that "Woolf" was really about four gay men, and so on—have probably made him a little skeptical of our ability to grasp the sharp turns his mind takes. In any case, if "Counting the Ways" is "about" anything it's about the ways in which decorum and intelligence are put to the test when we discover that the ideology we attach to romantic love—marriage, fidelity, desire—doesn't work. How can one bear the reality of compromise? There's no way out except to tell ugly truths in the most polite tone you can muster and enjoy the flash of the verbal knife. Shortly after making her list of things to get, Seldes says to Murray (who is, of course, offstage), "Do you suppose stuffing it in me . . . is something I enjoy?" She goes on, "Do you? Putting it in me like a wad of dough . . . hoping it'll 'rise'

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Edward Albee, New York City, September 29, 2003.

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to the occasion? Do you think that fills me with a sense of . . . what? Fills me with anything but itself?"

The agony of flesh on flesh embedded in mutual isolation: Albee peels away at those layers to reveal more layers, more fictions, several truths. In this, he brings to mind the poetry of one of his contemporaries, James Merrill. Like Merrill, Albee is as interested in the artificiality of speech—he puts lip gloss on his walking corpses—as he is in what it reveals about what we can't face in others, or in ourselves.

Seldes and Murray play Albee's sadness over his disbelief in romantic love for what it's worth, which is a great deal. Albee is an intellectual who has always been slightly shy about his ability to think out loud, through his characters. Their crustiness is but a thin scrim. Behind it, one can feel the beating of Albee's aching, vulnerable heart.

Samuel Beckett (1906-89) had a significant influence on Albee's style. Listening to the three short pieces by Beckett that constitute the first half of the program, it's fairly easy to see why. Like Beckett, Albee makes language play on the listener's ear and in his imagination. As Mouth, in "Not I," Seldes brilliantly delivers a sixty-year-old woman's fragmented monologue that combines gossip with litanies of faith. The upper-class Irish accent that she uses grates on the nerves like a migraine.

Seldes has nothing to work with apart from her captivating voice. She is alone on a dark stage, surrounded by black curtains, and all we can see is her mouth, which is painted bright crimson. It's like the point on a drill, boring deeper and deeper as she rants about a young woman's promiscuity (her own, perhaps), the passing of time, the smallness of the world (or is it the smallness of her mind?), and her faith in God. Although Beckett was brought up as a Protestant, he was not a religious man. But he never left off questioning the meaning of life. Albee, perpetually a spiritual orphan, was adopted by a couple at the age of two weeks, and the woman, by all accounts, despised him. We are fortunate that Beckett and Albee came to believe in that most ancient of rituals—the theatre—and chose to worship there. ♦

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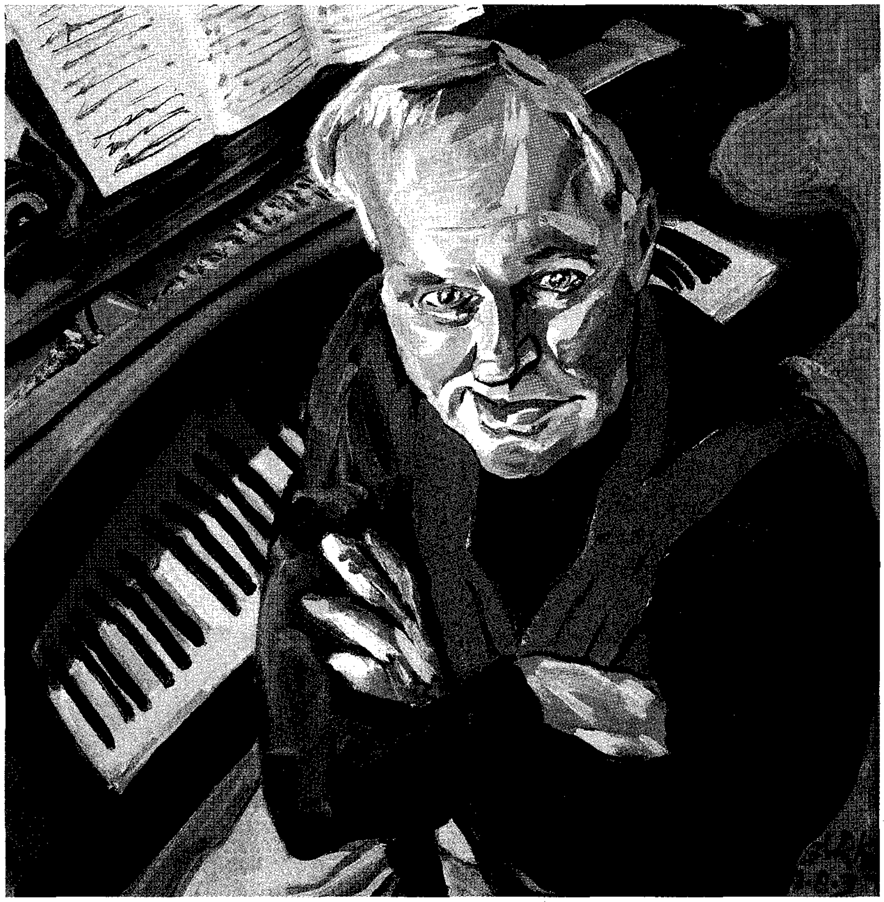
MUSICAL EVENTS

THE GENTLEMAN COMPOSER

Eighty years of Ned Rorem.

BY ALEX ROSS



Rorem's sweet music, dismissed by modernists, now sounds peculiarly fresh.

PHILIP BURKE

Ned Rorem will not go away. For decades, he has been an elegant anomaly among American composers, adhering to an austerely lyrical Franco-American style that went out of fashion sometime during the Eisenhower Administration. He came of age in the nineteen-forties, when a young composer could go to Paris, dash off a bundle of unaffectedly beautiful songs, and get written up in the weeklies alongside Norman Mailer and Montgomery Clift. Rorem was among the last American artists to pull off a plausible Parisian exile, and when he came back, in 1957, he found that composers were being hailed not for the excellence of their craft but for the extravagance of their theories. Time passed, and Rorem kept writing. The high-powered modernists who dismissed him as irrelevant became irrelevant themselves. Now he is celebrating his eightieth birthday, and, just as the man himself looks twenty years younger than he is, the music is sounding peculiarly fresh. Nothing in his thousand-work catalogue radiates genius, but the career gives off a kind of accidental grandeur—accidental because Rorem has famously disavowed the grand gesture in composition.

The oddity of Rorem's career is that ever since he made his literary début, in 1966, with "Paris Diary," he has been known more for his writing than for his music. The writing has an insolence and a swagger that the music lacks. The spectacular self-absorption of the diaries—"A

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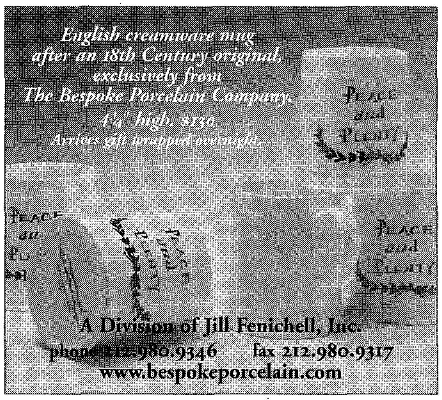

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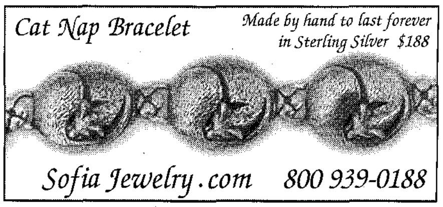

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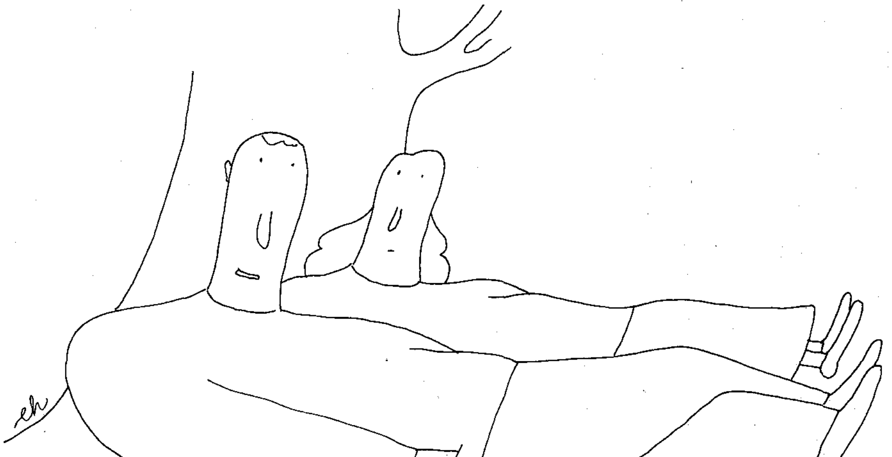

"It's no use, Brenda. You're a vegan, and I'm the Eastern Seaboard senior sales rep for Amalgamated Pure Pork Portions, listed on the New York Stock Exchange as APPP. Yum yum, and not a bad buy at that."

• •

stranger asks, 'Are you Ned Rorem?' I answer, 'No,' adding, however, that I've heard of and would like to meet him'"—made the young Rorem famous for being famous in his mind. He was, at the same time, a pioneer of modern gay culture, speaking freely and fearlessly of his desires. The musical essays and reviews hold up better; they may not be quite as deft as those of his mentor Virgil Thomson, but they are less often egregiously wrong. (After rereading Rorem's superb appreciations of Benjamin Britten, I turned to Thomson on "Peter Grimes": "not a piece of any unusual flavor or distinction.") The "Ned Rorem Reader," a recent compilation from Yale University Press, can stand beside Berlioz's "Memoirs," Debussy's "Monsieur Croche the Dilettante-Hater," and Morton Feldman's "Give My Regards to Eighth Street" as one of the wisest and wittiest composer books ever published.

Rorem the composer is a more reticent being. He has his heart-on-sleeve moments, but more often he speaks in shy, gentlemanly phrases. Melancholy lurks in even the brightest corners of the music—a melancholy that has surfaced more strongly in Rorem's recent writing, in particular his diary "Lies," which recounts the final illness of his partner, the organist and composer James Holmes. Would we pay less attention to Rorem if he did not have such a way with words? Perhaps, but it is also possible that Rorem would never have acquired a literary reputation if he had not made his name in music first. As usual, he says it best: "I am a composer who also writes, not a writer who also composes."

Early on, *Time* called Rorem "the world's best composer of art songs." The phrase has followed him around like a faithful puppy ever since. The songs are, indeed, among the best in the contemporary canon, showing Rorem's uncanny ability to breathe notes into words while leaving a poet's thoughts intact. In 1997, he produced a tour de force of his text-setting art, the cycle "Evidence of Things Not Seen," which incorporates thirty-six poems by twenty-three poets. It takes the listener on a quietly epic journey from innocence to experience and on to solitude and extinction—essentially, the entire span of a human life. The Curtis Institute, in Philadelphia, will present the cycle on Rorem's birthday, which falls on October 23rd; the Miller Theatre, in New York, will reprise it the following day.

The songs are a given; it's the instrumental music that is in danger of being overlooked. In the last decade, Rorem has written three string quartets that rival any modern American efforts in the form. All are made of short movements in succession; most of Rorem's longer instrumental pieces follow this pattern. The individual movements sound like genre studies or cast-off sketches, but they coalesce into unexpectedly gripping narratives. The Fourth Quartet, which the Emerson Quartet recently played at Zankel Hall, includes a once-in-a-lifetime movement called "Self Portrait," in which the cello holds forth in a rambling, halting chant while the three other strings play frigid chords around it. It's like a less innocent version of Ives's "The Unanswered Question," a work in which solo voices ring out against a background of unchanging, oblivious strings. Here, oblivion appears to encroach on the protagonist and eventually stamp out all embers of emotion.

Rorem's writing for orchestra is equally impressive. He capitalizes on his reputation for understatement by saving huge sonorities for significant occasions; as a result, his rare musical outbursts seem not so much theatrical as visceral, as if they were blows sustained in real time. The thirteen-minute tone poem "Eagles" unleashes a welter of sound, but the clean, treble-heavy orchestration never thumps in place or plods along; it simply lifts off, like the birds of the title. The recent Cello Concerto nods several times to favorite predecessors—pealing, dissonant fanfares recall Messiaen; a kind of slide show of contrasting chords brings back the Interview Scene in Britten's "Billy Budd"—but it also includes three extended songs without words which could have been composed only by Rorem, each one sadder, lonelier, kindlier than the next. There are many first-rate pieces of this kind—the Third Symphony, the Violin Concerto, "Lions," "Sunday Morning," the Piano Concerto in Six Movements—but it is a rare day that you hear any of them in the composer's home town of New York.

A paradox haunts Rorem's career. He insists that he has no interest in making "Major Statements," yet he has always longed to be taken seriously—to have major statements made about him. He has grumbled many times in print over the genuflections rendered toward an atonal showman such as Elliott Carter, who happens to be celebrating his ninety-fifth birthday this year (and looks eighty). Indeed, Carter has benefitted from a version of the intentional fallacy, according to which any music that is complex in design is automatically held to be complex in effect. Rorem's scores seem, by comparison, modest and naïve, but this description applies only to their surface, and not to their emotional or psychological import. Rorem resembles such latter-day figurative painters as Fairfield Porter and Jane Freilicher, who followed the onslaught of Abstract Expressionism with landscapes and still-lifes. Their deceptively conventional images conceal large, ambiguous worlds of feeling.

The recent diaries of Rorem are painful to read, not because the author is indulging the old exhibitionism but because he is exposing losses suffered by his ego. One entry shocked me: he notes that for nearly a year he heard nothing from the Beaux Arts Trio about his work "Spring Music," which he had been commissioned to write for them. It's one thing not to get a phone call returned—but a half-hour composition? Rorem may have a famous name, but he works down in the trenches with the thousand American composers who labor more for love than for fame, and never for money. Notably, his eightieth-birthday celebrations are unfolding not at Lincoln Center but at smaller venues like the Miller Theatre, Merkin Hall, and the 92nd Street Y and at music-loving churches such as St. Thomas and St. John the Baptist. (Likewise, Rorem's music has tended to thrive on independent labels; among the best current releases are "Bright Music" and the three symphonies, on Naxos; "Evidence of Things Not Seen," on New World; "Eagles," on Albany; and "War Scenes," on Phoenix.) If Rorem has been frozen out of the pretentious marketplace of *neue Musik*, he has the satisfaction of seeing his music prosper in communities for which it fills an immediate need. He is following Britten's great injunction: "Our job is to be useful, and to the living."

To read Rorem's writing is to feel the agony and the bravery of composing in America. Anyone who writes music for a living is a hero, and Rorem is more heroic than most, because he has compromised so little of what he holds dear. His prose will outlast the sneering of his critics, and his music is too mysteriously sweet to die away. To him should go the final word: "The frustration of being nonexistent keeps us awake." ♦

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YOUNG BLOOD

Christine Jeffs' "Sylvia."

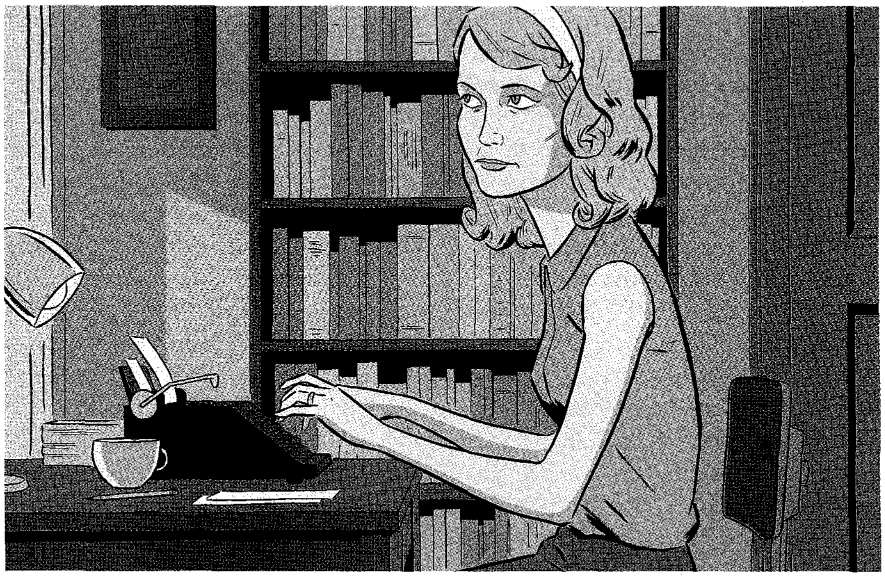
BY ANTHONY LANE

One of the more impressive things about "Sylvia," which recounts the life and death of Sylvia Plath, is the fact that the film was made at all. When I worked for the book-review section of a newspaper, we had a vague premonition that hardened into a single, inflexible rule of office procedure: Do not, under any circumstances, write or publish anything on the subject of Sylvia Plath, especially if it concerns her marriage to Ted Hughes. At the merest mention of his or her name in print, winged covens of family members or acquaintances, backed by defenders of either the Plath camp or the Hughes clan (but never both), would descend from the hills, baying for blood. There were times when the air would grow dark with libel writs. I therefore salute the writer of "Sylvia," John Brownlow, and the director, Christine Jeffs, for their courage in setting off across this particular minefield.

The story begins in 1956, in the primeval fogs of Cambridge, England, where Plath (Gwyneth Paltrow), who has come to the university on a Fulbright scholarship, attends a literary party. A jazz band is playing, quite well—a detail that immediately awakened my suspicions, given that the whole point of student jazz, then as now, is that it should sound like two cats beating up a goose. But "Sylvia" plays slow and loose with the authenticities of Plath's life, rearranging chunks of her existence as if moving furniture around a room, and eliding the dramatis personae at important points. All of this—the privilege of the filmmaker—will cause devoted Plathians to throb at the temples, and will also serve to remind us what a natural and eruptive exaggerator of her own life the poet was. At that same party, for instance, she met a Mr. Edward Hughes: "Then he kissed me bang smash on the mouth and ripped my hair band off. . . . And when he kissed my neck I bit him long and hard on the cheek, and when we came out of the room, blood was running down his face."

Given that many Cambridge couples take six months to reach the handshake stage, this—as reported in Plath's journal the following day—was fast work. Whether it is true is another matter, and Christine Jeffs takes the audacious step of playing down Plath's account (as Hughes himself invariably did), allowing the pair of lovebirds simply to dance and gaze at one another. The kiss, when it comes, has neither bang nor smash, and that is what I liked about "Sylvia": it gathers up potentially hysterical material and lays it out in calm—the calmness not of squeamish good taste but of the eerily stunned behavior that comes of toiling under intolerable pressure.

Hughes is played by Daniel Craig—recently seen as Paul Newman's son in "Road to Perdition"—who must have read Plath's squirming account of her man in a letter ("a large, hulking, healthy Adam . . . a singer, story-teller, lion and world-wanderer, a vagabond who will never stop"), and run to hide in the nearest bathroom. Craig does not much resemble Hughes, but who does? Philip Larkin remarked that he looked like "a Christmas present from Easter Island," a description that will stand unchallenged to the end of time, but, even if Craig lacks the brick jaw, he gets the glower, the taciturnity, the funereal corduroys, and the forelock of black hair that was such a fishhook to the attention of the women who swam around. Watching Mr. and Mrs. Hughes together, we get the sense—the one thing that "Sylvia," like any fractured love story, yearns to convey—of a couple who lock and twist inescapably into one another, and for whom any rift is thus an instant abyss.



Gwyneth Paltrow makes a valiant effort not to transform "Sylvia" into a vanity project.

ADRIAN TOMINE

Then, there is Gwyneth Paltrow. There are extravagant numbers of Paltrow-dissers out there, who take vicious exception to—who knows?—her seriousness, her breeding, her beauty, or her unfair amalgam of all three. To give her credit, she makes a valiant effort not to transform "Sylvia" into a vanity project; just as you are melting at the sight of all those polka dots, pearls, and twin-sets (the uniform of Plath's early years), Paltrow cunningly subsides into a haggard, snuffling moper in Wellington boots. In short, she becomes an honorary Brit. The reason for this change is that the movie is split between the arenas of her gladiatorial marriage: Cambridge; then a voyage to the Plath family home in Wellesley (where her mother is played with wonderful tenseness by Paltrow's own mother, Blythe Danner); then a summer on Cape Cod; then back to England—the wildness of Devon and, finally, London again, where Sylvia gassed herself in the bleak midwinter of 1963.

So much of this is miasma. When the Hugheses take friends for a walk on Dartmoor, they tramp through a sickly, jaundiced mist, with the sun fighting to break through; the scene is wrapped in the same suffocating air that enfolded "The Hound of the Baskervilles." As for coloring, well, anybody prone to seasickness should probably watch this film with a flask of brandy. Just look at the nauseous green of the ocean off Cape Cod, with Hughes at the oars of a boat that plunges and sways, or the pond-like green of the bath in which Sylvia lies and stews, or, for that matter, the stony green of the blackboard in front of which she teaches a supine class at Smith College. That must be deliberate design, and it proves that, if Sylvia Plath had to be scrutinized by a movie director, she was lucky to get this one. Christine Jeffs made her feature-film début two years ago, with "Rain"; she is clearly one of the world's leading water-based directors, and nobody can read far into Plath without splashing into her mania for the marine and the submarine—"While a green pool opens its eye, / Sick with what it has swallowed."

In brief, "Sylvia" strives to find visual kinship with the poems, rather than stumble into the trap of trying to film artistry at work. There are no gruesome scenes of Plath hammering away joyously on a typewriter; instead, we are treated to the far more convincing sight of a poet in mid-block. On Cape Cod, where Hughes strolls in saying, "Got a poem, a good one," as if describing a fish he's just caught for supper, his wife stays home and bakes cakes. These look scrumptious, and I found myself wishing that the happy couple could have stayed in America instead of returning to the misery—albeit the creatively propitious misery—of early-nineteen-sixties England. We would have missed the poetry, but, if Sylvia's icing is anything to go by, we might have gained a rival to Betty Crocker.

Yet the Hugheses did go back, and from here on the film registers the shock waves that radiated outward from Sylvia's discontent. In Anne Stevenson's biography of Plath, there is an acute comment from Dido Merwin, who was then the wife of W. S. Merwin. The odd thing about the "public and/or chronic scenes" that Sylvia made, Merwin writes, is that "from the point of view of dramatic action virtually nothing happened. To call them sulks because they were conducted in silence—apart from the occasional monosyllabic shrug—would be to suggest a switched-off, withdrawn dissociation on Sylvia's part that was exactly the opposite of the inescapable blast of hostile activity that she directed at each individual who happened to be involved." This undramatic drama would be a tough call for any movie, and Paltrow does a fine job of sitting in company and sizzling like hot oil. There is a dinner in Devon, given for the poet David Wevill (Andrew Havill) and his wife, Assia (Amira Casar), which may be the least pleasant social occasion ever filmed; when Plath glares at people through frosted glass, we seem to be offered a glimpse of her own mental bumps and blurs. Hughes later did have an affair with Assia, and you half wonder if he was driven toward it by the tides of his wife's accusing rage, although it is equally true that anybody as murderously beautiful as Amira Casar could break up most marriages with one glance.

Will "Sylvia" send viewers out of the movie theatre and back to the verse, or will they find better and saner things to do? For those slouching toward middle age, Plath's poems are no longer guaranteed to provide either solace or provocation; she herself, like a war poet, was granted no middle age, and we can never know how the riper Plath might have chosen to outgrow, or even disown, the bitter fruits of her youth. Hers is a country for young men and, more obsessively, for young women; I now suffer from a constitutional aversion to her poetry, as one should to any art or writing that casts a spell on one's teenage years, and the extremity of her self-absorption, which a movie as careful and sociable as "Sylvia" can never properly catch, seems as likely to repel as to entrance. Having dreaded the prospect of "Sylvia," I admired it precisely because it refuses to play along with the mythologizing that has sprung up, and vulgarized, the lives of two poets. The film neither raises Plath up nor cuts her off at the knees, and, at the eleventh hour, it even permits us to smile at her plight. "You must think I'm a stupid American bitch," she says to a kindly old neighbor in London. "Not at all, my dear," he replies. "I assumed you were Canadian." ♦

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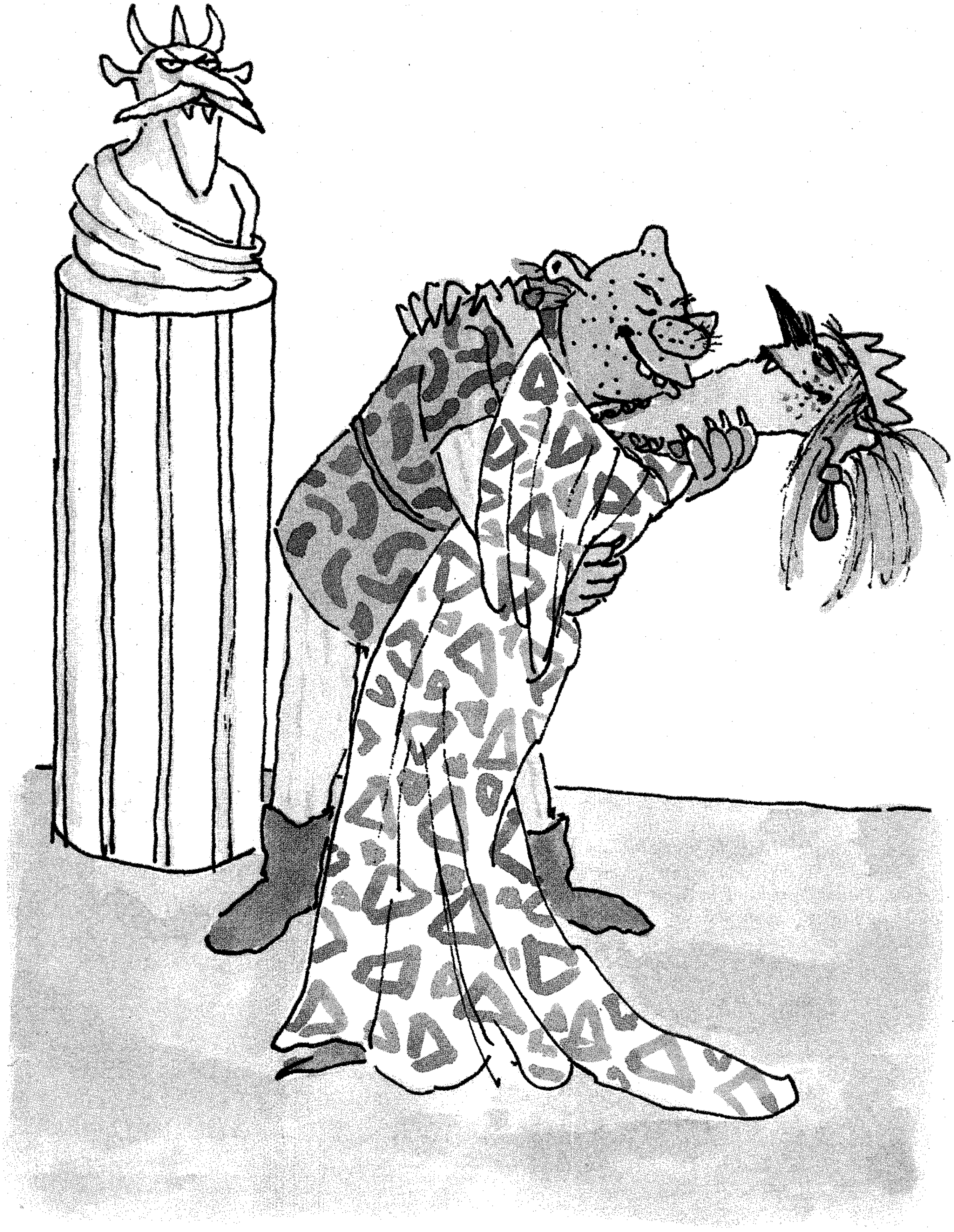

"Shrek snapped at her nose. She nipped at his ear. They clawed their way into each other's arms. Like fire and smoke, these two belonged together."

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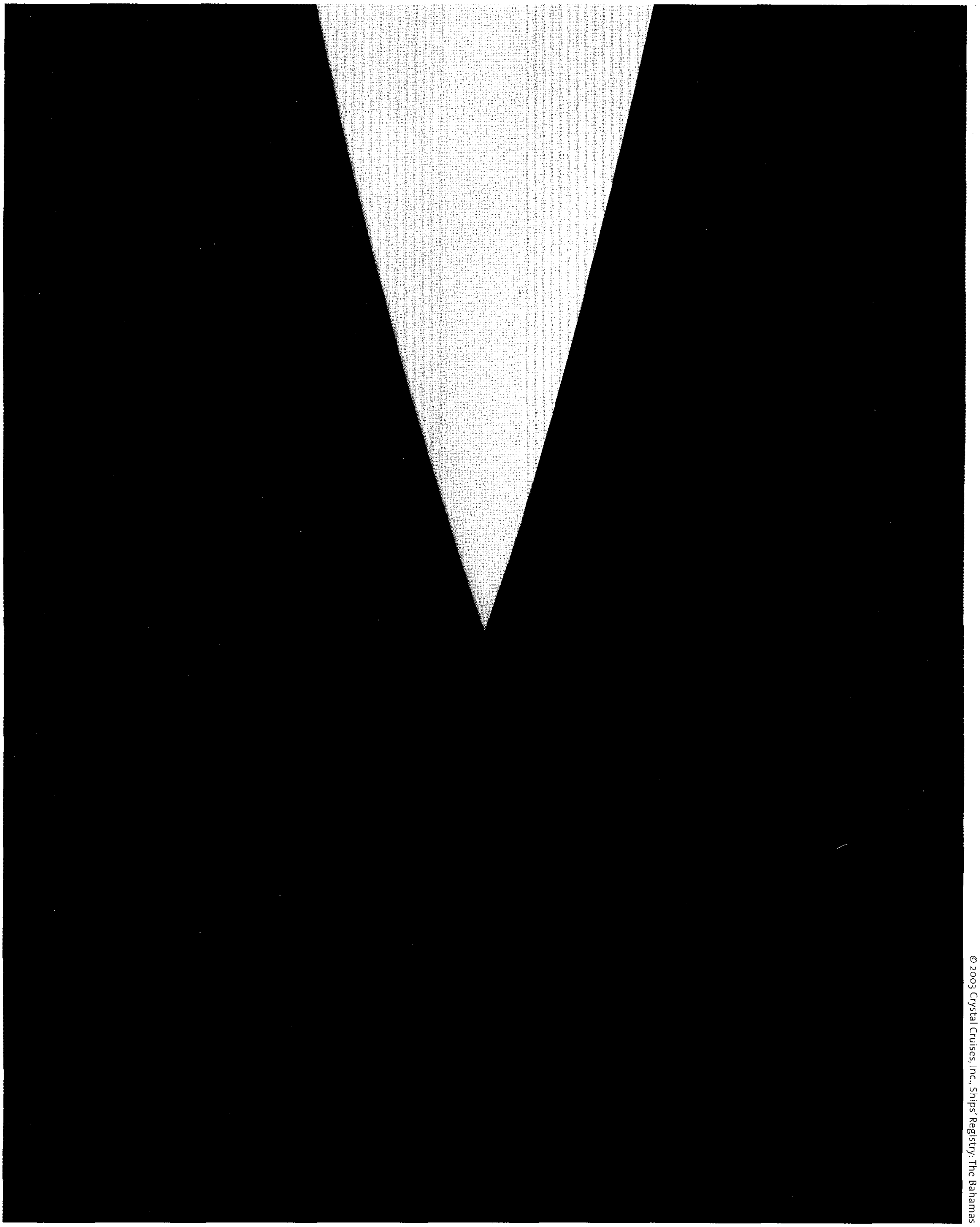

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